

Getting Results by Engaging and Sustaining High-Risk Couples

Creating Lasting Family Connections Marriage Enhancement Program

Abstract

The Jefferson County Healthy Marriage Initiative of the Council on Prevention and Education: Substances (COPEs), Inc. provides **marriage enhancement, family enrichment and healthy relationship programming** to offenders who are reentering Louisville, Kentucky following incarceration and/or who are in recovery from substance abuse. Recruited primarily through agency partners including the Kentucky Department of Corrections, Dismas Charities, and the Volunteers of America, these **married participants are ex-offenders who have received substance abuse treatment during incarceration** and who receive aftercare services from Dismas Charities or Volunteers of America upon reentry into the Louisville Metro Area (Jefferson County).

COPEs implements an adapted version of its nationally recognized, evidence-based, family strengthening program, **Creating Lasting Family Connections (CLFC)**. **CLFC is a model program** recognized by CSAP, SAMHSA, OJJDP, the United States Department of Education and the **National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP)** as an effective, evidence-based family strengthening program. The **Creating Lasting Family Connections Marriage Enhancement program** was previously adapted to specifically address stresses within a marriage when one of its members has been incarcerated or is in recovery from substance abuse and to develop specific skills married partners find useful to reestablish strong family harmony.

The CLFC Marriage Enhancement Program can be provided in a **weekend retreat format, a 10 session format, or the extensive 20 session format**. Therefore a couple may receive 16, 20, or 40 hours of Marriage Enhancement programming depending upon the format they choose.

Research Questions

When working with married couples who have experienced previous incarceration and substance abuse treatment, can you **recruit, retain, and improve the quality** of their relationship and the relationship with their children?

Our hypothesis was that CLFC will **increase self-report quality of marriage** by increasing each of the following measures:

1. Communication skills
2. **Conflict Resolution skills**
3. Intrapersonal skills
4. **Emotional Awareness skills**
5. **Emotional Expression skills**
6. Interpersonal skills
7. Relationship Management
8. **Relationship Satisfaction**
9. Relationship Commitment

We also wanted to see if we could **increase the capacity of our 9 partner agencies** to implement evidence-based family interventions with low-income ex-offenders and their families by increasing the following:

1. **Communication and trust**
2. Local knowledge and capacity to implement family-based programming interventions
3. Level of **commitment to serve ex-offenders**
4. Level of satisfaction with the implementation of the Jefferson County Healthy Marriage Initiative

Methodologies

- Single group pre-test post-test design (with 2 post-tests)
- **Baseline, Exit, and Follow-up Questionnaires**
Administered pre-program, post-program, and 3-6 months after completion of program
- **Retrospective Survey**
(asking participants to respond to both BEFORE and NOW questions on one post-program questionnaire)
- **Collaborating Partner Survey**
(gauging partner agency satisfaction and commitment to the project)
Administered once a year by evaluator

Preliminary Results

Outcome Data from Baseline, Exit, and Follow-up Evaluations

There were increases from baseline to follow-up on all 9 outcomes.

	Commun- -ication (8 questions)	Conflict Resolution (6 questions)	Intra- Personal (9 questions)	Emotional Awareness (9 questions)	Emotional Expression (9 questions)	Inter- Personal (8 questions)	R/S Mgmt. (8 questions)	R/S Satisfact. (7 questions)	R/S Commit. (7 questions)
Baseline to Exit	+2.28	+1.32	+1.86	+2.29	+2.79	+1.88	+1.80	+3.10	+0.69
Exit to F/Up	+0.42	+0.41	+0.02	+0.83	+0.42	+0.26	-0.13	+0.14	+0.05
Baseline to F/Up	+2.70	+1.73	+1.88	+3.12	+3.18	+2.14	+1.67	+3.24	+0.74

(Mean increases on a 5-point Likert-type scale)

Outcome Data from Retrospective Surveys

Following their involvement in the CLFC Marriage Enhancement Program:

10 Session Format

54% more respondents “strongly agree” they have the capability to validate their partner’s and other’s thoughts and feelings

66% more respondents “strongly agree” they have the skills to develop a closer relationship with their partner

Weekend Retreat Format

54% more respondents “strongly agree” they have the capability to validate their partner’s and other’s thought’s and feelings

76% more respondents “strongly agree” they have the skills to develop a closer relationship with their partner

Process Data from Retrospective Surveys

Following their involvement in the CLFC Marriage Enhancement Program:

10 Session Format

98% of respondents reported “yes, definitely” they would recommend this program to friends

80% of respondents reported “excellent” when asked if the leaders/facilitators are dedicated and really work hard with the respondents

99% of respondents reported the leaders/facilitators were “excellent” overall

Weekend Retreat Format

95% of respondents reported “yes, definitely” they would recommend this program to friends

88% of respondents reported “excellent” when asked if the leaders/facilitators are dedicated and really work hard with the respondents

97% of respondents reported the leaders/facilitators were “excellent” overall

The CLFC Marriage Enhancement Program had a **92% completion rate*** with participating couples.
*Completion rate determined by couples receiving at least 80% of the program and completing a retrospective survey.

Demographics of Participants

Participant Races	Age Groups of Participants	Education Levels of Participants
Asian 0.80%	17-19 Years Old 2.70%	Less than high school 3.50%
Black/African American 52.50%	20-25 Years Old 11.20%	High school degree or GED 41.90%
Caucasian 43.50%	26-30 Years Old 27.90%	Some college 31.50%
Other 3.20%	31-35 Years Old 16.30%	College graduate 23.20%
	36-45 Years Old 26.40%	
	46+ Years Old 15.50%	

Conclusions/Lessons Learned

- **The Creating Lasting Family Connections Marriage Enhancement Program is getting results!**
- **Evidence-based programs**, like CLFC, **get results**
- High-risk couples get **immediate benefits with quality programming**
- High-quality, evidence-based programming **reduces attrition**
- High-risk couples need and appreciate **flexible programming options** (i.e. 10 sessions, weekend retreat)
- **Certified facilitators** (trained, skilled, nonjudgmental, and healthy) **are most effective** with high-risk couples
- **Ongoing training** from the evidence-based program developer proved to be **invaluable for both staff and participants**
- Having **Certified Prevention Specialists** and an MSSW on staff was extremely helpful with reentry/recovering participants
- **Cultural sensitivity** is imperative (i.e. sensitivity to prison experience, family values, socio-economic status, etc.)
- **Partner agencies** are **motivated** when their **ideas** are **incorporated**
- **High-risk couples** are able to develop and **increase skills** with their partner and their children

Testimonials

*This class has been very beneficial! **I’ve learned a lot about myself and how to communicate with my spouse.** All of the staff showed great compassion and their sincerity was greatly appreciated. **Before the Marriage Enhancement classes, my husband and I didn’t know where we were headed. Thanks to these classes we have hopes for a bright future.***
Jessica B., Panelist at 2009 OFA Grantee Conference

*We were unsure of what the COPEs class would be like or if the class would benefit us. Brooke and Boone put us at ease quickly! **And we not only had a blast but we grew closer together. Some parts were tough and challenging but all of it was rewarding.** A great way to spend one night a week!*
Greg & Amy D., 10-week program participants

*Having recently completed a long-term residential treatment program and gone home after, I found this Marriage Enhancement program to be extremely beneficial. **New in recovery, I found myself on very shaky ground with my spouse** because neither of us was very good at communicating with each other and we were at the “no hope” spot. **We have lots of room to grow**, but I am excited about the future because instead of growing apart, we are now able to grow together. **It has changed my (our) life and helped us grow closer and helped us have a future together.** Thank you for this opportunity.*
David S., 10-week program participant

*This weekend was beneficial to us because **we really needed this education/skill to help us express our feelings.** It also taught us what not to do when fighting or having a disagreement and gave us the proper way to try and settle differences in communication on a daily basis. Also, we were very pleased and comfortable this weekend and **the hospitality was excellent.***
Michael & Brook L., weekend retreat participants

Data from Collaborating Partner Surveys

Results of the most recent survey (June 2010) include:

- 100% of responding partners indicated they have seen an increase in organized collaboration toward needed prevention services since the project began.
- 100% of responding partners said their ideas or views have been taken seriously by the project.
- 96% of responding partners said they are satisfied with the participation of other member agencies in the partnership, up from 62% in year 1.
- 100% of responding partners are satisfied with project progress in year 4 compared to 50% in year 1.