



# Administration for Children and Families Healthy Marriage Initiative, 2002-2009



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Office of Family Assistance

**An Introductory Guide**

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## Introduction

Healthy marriage policy and programs are the “new kid on the block” in social policy. In the mid-90s several states and communities began to engage in marriage-related reforms and services designed to strengthen marriage and reduce divorce rates. In 2002, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) launched a Healthy Marriage Initiative and began funding research and service programs. This Introductory Guide provides a descriptive summary of the ACF Initiative in three parts:

- (i) Demonstration grants funded under existing discretionary programs administered by several offices and bureaus in ACF from 2002-2007;
- (ii) Demonstration five-year grants funded in 2006 under the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Act provisions of the Deficit Reduction Act (2005), administered by the Office of Family Assistance; and
- (iii) Research and evaluation activities funded since 2002 and administered by the Office of Policy, Research and Evaluation in ACF, designed to inform, improve and assess healthy marriage programs. Also included is a selection of research activities funded and administered by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), DHHS that relate to, and support, the goals of the ACF Healthy Marriage Initiative.

This guide gives a broad overview of the different types of activities that have been funded, the diversity of populations being served, and the various program settings in which these healthy marriage services are being offered. For more details about specific programs and funding information see [www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage). For information about healthy marriage and relationships research, evaluation and programs see the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, [www.healthymarriageinfo.org](http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org). For information about responsible fatherhood programs and related research and evaluation see the National Fatherhood Clearinghouse [www.fatherhood.gov](http://www.fatherhood.gov)

## Background

The ACF Healthy Marriage Initiative arose from two parallel and related developments.<sup>1</sup> First, in the late 1980s and early 1990s there was an emerging movement in states and communities to strengthen marriage, reduce divorce rates and thereby improve child wellbeing. This movement was fueled by a growing and large body of research that identified the negative effects of divorce on many children and the greater likelihood of disadvantage experienced by children raised by single parents. Initially state reform activities focused on legislation to make divorce more difficult, but then shifted to providing encouragement and activities designed

<sup>1</sup> This section of the guide draws substantially on the account of these developments in *Beyond Marriage Licenses: Efforts in States to Strengthen Marriage and Two Parent Families. A State by State Snapshot* by Theodora Ooms, Stacey Bouchet and Mary Parke. Center for Law and Social Policy. April 2004. [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org). Also see “Marriage as a Public Issue” by Steven Nock in *Marriage and Child Wellbeing* edited by Sara McLanahan, Elisabeth Donahue, and Ron Haskins. The Future of Children. Vol 15. No 2. Fall 2005. [www.futureofchildren.org](http://www.futureofchildren.org)

to prepare people better for marriage and help strengthen marriage. At the same time a growing number of marriage-related education services were being sponsored by the nongovernmental sector — faith-based organizations, university centers and community-based, non-profit organizations.

Second, the interest in marriage at the federal level arose from the debates about welfare reform, with the concern focusing primarily on the effects on child wellbeing and on the public costs of non-marital childbearing.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Congress, with the help of the Clinton administration, passed a major overhaul of the welfare system in 1996, turning it into a block grant to states (The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, PRWORA). Most of the attention focused on the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) law's requirements for welfare recipients to work and the time limits on assistance payments. However, three of the four declared purposes — and several of the provisions — of the new law referred to promoting marriage and two-parent families and reducing nonmarital births. A handful of states— including Arizona, Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, Oklahoma, Utah, — began allocating resources, including TANF dollars, towards strengthening marriage. More recently, Texas and Ohio have also committed TANF funds toward healthy marriage activities. Each of these states used the funding to encourage community and faith-based organizations to deliver marriage and relationship education at the local level.

Beginning in 2001, the Bush administration began working with congressional leaders on reauthorization of the welfare reform legislation. Over the next five years several versions of a reauthorization bill were introduced that amended the 1996 law in several ways including adding provisions that would encourage states to make greater efforts to promote and strengthen marriage, and, to a lesser extent, responsible fatherhood. The reauthorization bill that eventually became law in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 included the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Act which established a new grant program to fund healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood programs.

During the Bush administration, Wade Horn, PhD, the founder and director of the nonprofit National Fatherhood Initiative, became the Assistant Secretary for ACF. In 2001, he declared that strengthening marriage would be one of nine ACF priorities. The declared mission of the ACF Healthy Marriage Initiative is “to help couples, who have chosen marriage for themselves, gain greater access to marriage education services, on a voluntary basis, where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage.”

This guide describes healthy marriage and relationship programs, research and evaluation activities funded by ACF through discretionary program dollars and authorized funds. Marriage and relationships education is now being offered on a much larger scale to more economically, culturally, and racially diverse populations. It is also being offered to individuals, couples at different stages of their development, youth, and incarcerated adults. Program designs, strategies and curricula have been adapted to meet different contexts and needs, partnerships have been formed with domestic violence experts and agencies, early childhood programs,

<sup>2</sup> See Ron Haskins (2006), *Work over Welfare: The Inside Story of the 1996 Welfare Reform Law*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

schools and correctional facilities, and many innovative and creative approaches are being used to reach out to the general public.

## What are Marriage and Relationship Education Programs?

Marriage and relationship education (MRE) programs provide information and teach attitudes, skills and behaviors designed to help individuals and couples achieve long-lasting, happy, and successful marriages and intimate partner relationships. This includes making wise partner choices and avoiding or leaving abusive relationships. MRE can help single parents (never-married, separated or divorced) learn to co-parent effectively when this is appropriate, and have more successful relationships in the future.

MRE programs teach couples skills to use in their daily lives, including communication skills, ways to resolve conflict safely and effectively, and how to raise children and manage finances together.

Marriage and relationship information and education can be provided to the general public through media campaigns, websites, fact sheets, brochures, self-guided internet courses and other community outlets. Most commonly, MRE refers to structured programs, classes and workshops provided to groups of couples and individuals offered on a voluntary basis in the community, churches, campuses or schools.

**Special Cultural Initiatives.** ACF has developed four focused healthy marriage and relationship initiatives designed to encourage the development of culturally competent approaches specifically for African American, Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islanders and Native American populations. These initiatives can be accessed at the ACF Healthy Marriage Initiative web site ([www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage.org](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage.org)) and are very briefly described below.

**The African American Healthy Marriage Initiative (AAHMI)** mission is to promote and strengthen the institution of healthy marriage in the African American community. To move the Initiative forward the AAHMI has a three-pronged strategy: (i) education and communication with the African American community through the use of forums, high profile endorsements and dissemination of information; (ii) enhancement of partnerships by enlisting the support of African American media, faith and community-based organizations, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and African American civic, public and non-traditional organizations; (iii) facilitating access to community and ACF resources by building capacity in the African American community to deliver marriage education services.

The AAHMI has reached out to involve scholars, national and community leaders and practitioners in various ways including through sponsoring numerous national and local forums, conferences, roundtables and academies. Publications include fact sheets, statistics, research reports and summaries of meetings and events. (See also [www.aahmi.net](http://www.aahmi.net))

**The Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative (HHMI)** goal is to address the unique cultural, linguistic, demographic, and socio-economic needs of children and families in Hispanic communities. Strategies to engage the Hispanic community in effective, culturally appropriate ways are designed to: (i) increase awareness in the Hispanic community of the importance of the ACF Healthy Marriage Initiative; (ii) work

with the Hispanic Community and its leadership to design and inform an ongoing HHMI strategy; (iii) establish a base of receptivity and readiness in the Hispanic community for accessing healthy marriage funds; (iv) develop a long term strategy to broaden Hispanic healthy marriage discussion, strategy, and action.

Publications that have been developed include fact sheets, statistics, research reviews, working papers, list of Spanish language marriage education curricula, and other resources for researchers, evaluators, program directors and service providers. In collaboration with the Annie E Casey Foundation the HHMI has developed a series of special supplemental curriculum modules (available in Spanish and English) to be used to enhance existing healthy marriage curricula (see [www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/about/hispanic\\_hm\\_initiative.508.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/about/hispanic_hm_initiative.508.html) ).

The mission of the **Asian and Pacific Islander Healthy Marriage and Family Strengthening Initiative (APIHMFSI)** is to address the unique cultural, linguistic, demographic, and socio-economic needs of children and families in the Asian and Pacific Islander community in order to promote strong families and healthy marriages. ([www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/about/asianandpacific.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/about/asianandpacific.html))

**The Native American Family Preservation Initiative (NAFPI)** was created to strengthen Native American families and communities. Led by the Administration for Native Americans, the NAFPI brings culturally relevant resources to Native American communities and organizations and supports the delivery of family preservation and healthy marriage education services to youth, individuals, couples, parents, and grandparents. Family preservation and healthy marriage service providers are adapting and creating programs to include culturally appropriate messages and services. Although there is limited research in this field, programs are being evaluated to determine strategies to effectively strengthen families, marriages, and relationships among Native Americans. (see [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ana/programs/NAHMI/Index.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ana/programs/NAHMI/Index.html))

## Part I: ACF Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grants, 2002-2007

In 2002, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) began using several existing program vehicles available in offices and bureaus that provide a range of services to children and families. The idea was to begin to explore and test different ways of integrating a focus on strengthening couple relationships and encouraging marriage, and thereby stabilize families in order to reinforce the goals of the existing service programs.

**Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE).** The goals of the OCSE are to aid states and tribes in locating non-custodial parents, establishing paternity and obtaining and enforcing child support orders. However, over the past decade, child support enforcement has begun to look beyond this basic perspective and has experimented with efforts designed to promote child well-being and family strengthening. Between 2003 and 2006, OCSE awarded eleven discretionary grants in the area of promoting healthy relationships among unwed couples for the purpose of improving children's financial and medical security. The selected grantees were

community-based and built organizational capacities (including both secular and faith-based partnerships) for purposes of providing marriage and relationship education (MRE) to a diverse population of low-income parents. The majority of these projects have ended (at the time of this update- 7/2009) and final abstracts with findings are posted to the OCSE Web site as they become available.

Also during this time frame, a total of 15 State IV-D agencies received waivers to fund healthy marriage/responsible fatherhood activities in support of existing child support services (CSE). These demonstration projects have a 3 to 5 year project cycle and overall span implementation dates ranging from 2004 to 2012. And as with the discretionary grants, final abstracts with findings are posted to the OCSE Web site as they become available.

**Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).** The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) working with states and local organizations provides refugee individuals and families with critical resources, including cash, medical assistance, housing, employment, legal and other social services, to assist them in becoming integrated members of American society. The refugee populations come primarily from countries in Africa, South East Asia, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe.

Since 2002 the ORR has awarded discretionary grants to several national and local organizations to develop pilot marriage education programs in around 20 cities to help local community leaders understand the many challenges and stresses refugee couples and their families face during the resettlement experience, and develop ways of teaching culturally appropriate communication, problem solving and financial management skills to these couples and families. The Refugee Healthy Marriage Program currently funds 10 grantees at approximately \$4 million. These programs are designed to translate and adapt contemporary American approaches to marriage education to traditional practices and cultural settings.

**Children's Bureau (CB).** The Children's Bureau mission is to provide for the safety, permanency and wellbeing of children through leadership, support for necessary services, and productive partnerships with States, Tribes, and communities. It works to develop programs that focus on preventing the abuse of children in troubled families, protecting children from abuse, and finding permanent placements for those who cannot safely return to their homes.

Since 2003 this bureau has awarded a total of 41 healthy marriage demonstration grants ranging from three to five years duration. The grants have been focused in four program areas to include Promoting Safe and Stable Families; Child Welfare Training; Post Adoption Services; and Child Abuse and Neglect. The grantees have utilized a variety of services, curricula and techniques to address strengthening relationships for couples already married, engaged couples, couples cohabiting, single co-parenting individuals and couples who have adopted children from the child welfare system.

Since 2003 this bureau has awarded five healthy marriage training grants to universities to develop training programs and curricula to be integrated into training programs for child welfare staff. The goal is to improve

staff ability to strengthen the relationships and ability to co-parent of adoptive and foster care parents and other families in the child welfare system. In addition it has funded around ten demonstration community-based programs to provide couples education and support services to couples adopting or fostering special needs children, and to low-income couples at risk of child abuse and neglect.

**Office of Community Services (OCS).** The mission of the Office of Community Services is to work in partnership with states, communities, and other agencies to provide a range of human and economic development services and activities which ameliorate the causes and characteristics of poverty, promote self sufficiency and build the stability and capacity of children, youth, and families so that they become able to create their own opportunities.

In 2003, OCS funded through its Community Services Block Grant three one-year grants to Community Action Agencies for pilot relationship and marriage education programs. In addition, as part of the Assets for Independence Program it awarded a technical assistance contract to link marriage education services with financial literacy and asset development activities provided by over 300 organizations around the country that work to help low-income families build financial assets and achieve greater economic stability. A product of this grant is a unique resource guide, *Building Assets, Building Stronger Families*, which includes innovative curricula modules which integrate ideas from financial education with concepts and skills involved in marriage and relationship education. Although designed to be used by Individual Development Assets (IDA) practitioners, it can be used by many other educators and human service practitioners. (See [http://idaresources.org/IDA\\_financial\\_literacy.php](http://idaresources.org/IDA_financial_literacy.php))

**Administration for Native Americans (ANA).** ANA promotes the goal of economic and social self-sufficiency for American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and other Native American Pacific Islanders. ANA funds a wide variety of services and projects aimed at the development of stable, diversified local economies, that safeguard the health and well-being of Native children and families; and reduce dependency, and that foster youth and intergenerational activities in Native American communities. ANA projects are planned, designed, and implemented by Native American community members to address the particular needs of their society.

Since 2003, the ANA has used discretionary dollars to fund 23 tribal healthy marriage programs and provide them with training and technical assistance. Some of these programs are also supported by tribal funds beyond the required federal match. The programs offer relationships skills training for individuals, couples, parents, and youth, promote father and extended family involvement, parenting education and other family strengthening activities.

**Head Start (OHS).** The Head Start program mission is to promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families. They engage parents in their children's learning, offer parent education, and help parents make progress toward their own educational, literacy and employment goals.

In 2007, the Office of Head Start awarded 24 Healthy Marriage Initiative grants. These five-year grants provide funding for Head Start and Early Head Start grantees to offer marriage and relationship education services to their current service population, the siblings of Head Start children, as well as Head Start eligible families in their service areas. The grants extend access to voluntary marriage education services to low-income couples and individuals who would not otherwise have these services available. The goal of these grants is to improve child wellbeing by strengthening family formation and healthy marriage among Head Start and Early Head Start families, including married couples, engaged couples or couples planning marriage, and individuals desiring to develop relationship skills for the future purpose of forming a healthy marriage and family.

The OHS Healthy Marriage Initiative Grants were awarded to provide an opportunity for Head Start and Early Head Start grantees to partner with other organizations in their communities to offer a full range of practical skill-building sessions on communication, joint decision making, parenting, managing of family budgets, conflict resolution, and other elements to enhance family stabilization. Services are offered to individuals and couples contemplating marriage and to couples wishing to strengthen their relationships.

In total, over \$7.7 million annually was awarded to Head Start grantees to provide healthy marriage and relationship education. The grants range from \$40,000 to about \$500,000, with an average award size of approximately \$324,500. Grantees are located in 16 states and Puerto Rico.

## **Part II: Office of Family Assistance Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grants, October 2006**

### **Background**

This snapshot provides an overview of the healthy marriage programs funded by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) in October 2006. The snapshot details the types of organizations that have been funded by OFA and the activities they are being funded to conduct. The information summarized here was obtained, in part, by the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) team during discussions with grantees in early 2007, soon after the programs were funded. Additional information was gathered through interactions with grantees during the course of ongoing technical assistance.

The Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005 included \$150 million each year for five years to support programs designed to help couples form and sustain healthy marriages and encourage and promote responsible fatherhood (\$100 million for healthy marriage and up to \$50 million for responsible fatherhood).

In October 2006, OFA awarded 125 healthy marriage grants to 123 grantees (two organizations received two grants each). Award sizes ranged from \$132,000 to \$2,342,000, with an average yearly award size of approximately \$610,000. All grantees were required to provide a grant match (in-kind or cash) equal to 10% of the total project budget. Grantees are located in 33 states, the District of Columbia and American Samoa. Texas is home to the highest number of Healthy Marriage grantees, with 15. In addition, out of the \$100 million, funds were used to provide additional support for the longitudinal evaluation of healthy marriage demonstration programs, technical assistance activities, and for staff to monitor the grants.



From the \$50 million that was allocated for responsible fatherhood (RF), 100 programs were funded. The goals of these programs are to help men be more committed, involved, and responsible fathers. Grantees could select to provide some additional services including employment-related services and marriage-related programming. Of the originally funded RF grantees, more than one-third included healthy marriage programming. [For more information on Responsible Fatherhood grantees, and the media campaign to promote responsible fatherhood, contact The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse ([www.fatherhood.gov](http://www.fatherhood.gov))]. The remainder of this snapshot will focus on healthy marriage and relationship programs and research.

### National Healthy Marriage Resource Center.

In October 2004, under a cooperative agreement, the OFA funded the National Council of Family Relations and a consortium of Universities to operate a National Healthy Marriage Resource Center. In 2006, the Center was rebid and in September was awarded under a cooperative agreement to Public Strategies of Oklahoma City. NHMRC Team partners are: Public Strategies (Team lead), ICF International, The Lewin Group, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence(NRCDV), BarkleyREI and TRU (see [www.healthymarriageinfo.org](http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org))

The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center's (NHMRC) aims to be the nation's "first stop shop" in providing information, resources, technical assistance and training on healthy marriage and couple relationships to experts, researchers, program providers, policymakers, media, marriage educators and general public. The Center collaborates with other partners and sectors to integrate a couples and marriage perspective in their activities, when doing so will help them achieve their goals more effectively. It also convenes high level conferences to advance the field and create new knowledge by bringing together experts and leaders from different disciplines and sectors.

In 2009 the Center began a national research-based media campaign aimed at launching a national conversation about marriage among 18-30 year olds. This national media campaign is designed to provide positive healthy marriage and relationship messaging and information to 18-30 year olds in order to help them reach their relationship goals. Print, transit posters, web and radio ads are being disseminated nationally as public service announcements (PSAs). Media kits with these materials are available to local programs to use with community media.

The NHMRC manages two web sites:

- The **Healthy Marriage Info web site** ([www.healthymarriageinfo.org](http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org)) is a resource which primarily targets professionals in the healthy marriage field. It includes a clearinghouse/library, fact sheets, research briefs and the latest news/events from the field. The key audiences are Healthy Marriage (HM) grantees, other healthy marriage programs, policymakers, program providers, researchers, marriage educators, the media, and the general public.
- The **TwoOfUs web site** ([www.TwoOfUs.org](http://www.TwoOfUs.org)) is an interactive web site designed to provide well-grounded and practical information to people at various stages of relationships, including those who are

single, dating, engaged, married or remarried. The national media campaign directs young adults and the general public to this web site for relationship information and resources.

## Who Are the Healthy Marriage Grantees?

Grantees represent several different types of organizations and partnership arrangements. The majority (60%) of grantees are non-profit, community-based organizations. Other grantees are institutions of higher learning, county or state governments, for-profit companies, faith-based organizations (16%) and other types of organizations. Some healthy marriage programs represent new service additions to established community-based service delivery organizations, while others are free-standing programs focused primarily on healthy relationship and marriage education. More than 40% of grantees indicated they were members of a community healthy marriage coalition. Some of the programs also receive additional support from other public and private funders.

Grantees vary in both their experience administering a federal grant and in delivering healthy marriage education. More than 70% of grantees have prior experience administering a federal discretionary award. Although about a quarter grantees reported that they were very experienced marriage education providers, most grantees reported they were not. Indeed, a third reported that their experience with marriage education was nominal or non-existent.

## What kinds of activities and services do the grantees provide?

Under the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) and Office of Family Assistance (OFA) regulations, grantees are allowed to conduct several types of activities with various target populations. This section briefly describes the structure of this arrangement. The DRA outlines eight “allowable activities” that the appropriated monies can support that are described in the law as:

- 1) public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage and the skills needed to increase marital stability and health;
- 2) education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting;
- 3) marriage education, marriage skills, (including parenting, financial management and job services) for non-married expectant women and men;
- 4) marriage education for engaged couples and couples or individuals interested in marriage;
- 5) marriage enhancement and marriage skills training programs for married couples;
- 6) divorce reduction programs that teach relationship skills;
- 7) marriage mentoring using married couples as role models and mentors; and
- 8) programs to reduce the disincentives to marriage in means-tested programs, in conjunction with another activity from above.

In practice the phrase “marriage education” typically includes relationship education, especially for those programs serving youth, single adults and single parents who are not married. Relationship education focuses on learning basic relationship skills, engaging in healthy non-violent relationships, making wise partner choices and so forth.

All of the eight allowable activities are currently being funded and nearly 60% of grantees are engaging in more than one allowable activity. In early 2007 more than half of grantees originally funded reported that they were providing marriage education to married couples, and nearly half are providing marriage and relationship education to engaged couples and interested individuals. A similar percentage of grantees were serving non-married, expectant couples and non-married parents with a child under the age of three months. Four in 10 grantees were conducting community wide public advertising campaigns, while approximately one-third of grantees are providing marriage education to high school youth. Smaller percentages of grantees were using marriage mentor couples or providing divorce reduction programs.

### What additional requirements do grantees have to meet?

In addition to engaging in the allowable activities as delineated by the grant, programs must ensure compliance with several key requirements outlined in the Deficit Reduction Act. Grantees must adhere to the federal faith-based guidelines with regard to separation of church/state in curricula and the delivery of services (see 45 CFR Part 87). Grantees must also ensure that all client participation in healthy marriage and relationship education services delivered by the grant is voluntary. Grantees are required to consult with a domestic violence expert and describe how programs will address issues of domestic violence. Grantees report semi-annually on the steps they have taken to ensure compliance with these regulations.

Grantees are required to have an evaluation component, which at a minimum must clearly identify project milestones, expected outcomes, and describe the services and activities that were implemented in a program. In order to report semi-annually on their progress towards project milestones and service delivery outputs, grantees must collect this data on an ongoing basis.

### What educational curricula do the grantees use?

Since these programs are demonstrations trying out different approaches, OFA did not restrict grantees to a recommended list of education curricula. Instead, OFA provided guidelines outlining required content for inclusion in any relationships or marriage education curriculum the grantee chooses to use. As such, grantees are able to use any curriculum that adheres to federal faith-based guidelines and incorporates crucial marriage education concepts. Minimum required elements of marriage education curricula are: communication skills; conflict resolution skills, benefits of marriage (for adults, children, community, and society); qualities of healthy relationships and healthy marriages; commitment to healthy marriage (for current or future relationship); and discussion of values and beliefs about marriage or family. All grantees must deliver at least eight (8) hours of marriage education to “count” a participant as being served.

Grantees report using a wide number and variety of marriage education curricula. Approximately 60% of grantees are using more than one curriculum, while nearly one third of all grantees are employing all or parts of three or more different curricula. Although many grantees report using established curricula (some of which have been formally evaluated for effectiveness), more than 30% of curricula being delivered have either been developed by the grantee or are less well-known in the field. [For lists of many of these curricula see *A Guide to Low-Cost Curricula and Resources for Marriage and Relationship, Fatherhood and Parenting, and Financial*

*Education* (August 2009) Available at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/pdf/curricularesources\\_guide2009\\_doc.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/pdf/curricularesources_guide2009_doc.pdf)ACF.hhs. For additional information on marriage education curricula contact [info@healthymarriageinfo.org](mailto:info@healthymarriageinfo.org); ]

## How are the grantees implementing the Domestic Violence requirements?

The DRA required that grantees consult with domestic violence providers during program development and implementation. Previous ACF-funded grantees were required to develop a domestic violence protocol, which is a written site specific document that detailed how the programs would screen for domestic violence and address disclosures of domestic violence. Technical assistance was provided to help them develop these protocols.

Although the DRA does not require a written protocol but a process of consultation, many programs saw the benefit of creating a written protocol during the initial phases of their project. During initial NHMRC conversations with grantees, staff inquired whether they had developed a process to identify and respond to any domestic violence issues that participants might raise.

To assist grantees with understanding domestic violence issues and concerns, the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center and the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV) have presented and discussed these issues in webinars, at grantee roundtables and conferences and developed numerous technical assistance resources. With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the NHMRC recently published *Promoting Safety*, a Domestic Violence Resource Packet comprising a series of five related guides (see [www.healthymarriageinfo.org/about/domesticviolence.cfm](http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/about/domesticviolence.cfm)). This packet is designed to help marriage and relationship educators and program administrators understand and appropriately respond to domestic violence issues that may arise within their programs.

In May 2009 the NHMRC co-sponsored with the NRCDV a conference at the Airlie Center, Warrenton, VA on *Domestic Violence Typologies: Implications for healthy marriage and domestic violence programs*. Invited participants included nationally known researchers, practitioners and advocates. The conference goal was to better understand the research documenting different types of domestic violence and explore implications for practice. The conference findings will be summarized in a Guide for practitioners to be published in early 2010.

## How many individuals and couples are being served by the healthy marriage programs?

To date, since October 2006, roughly 270,000 students, individuals, and married couples have been served through healthy marriage grants funded under the DRA. Grantees also collect some descriptive statistics such as age, race, marital status, income etc. which can be useful to grantees when assessing their services. Grantees are not required to report these data in their semi-annual reports.

It is clear that grantees are serving a wide diversity of populations through these healthy marriage demonstration grants. Based on information provided by the grantees in original grant applications and in conversations with NHMRC staff in early 2007, and in their conversations with technical assistance providers the majority of grantees were targeting or intending to specifically recruit low-income individuals and couples as program participants. Many grantees are targeting ethnic or racial minorities.

## What kinds of technical assistance and evaluation activities are being funded?

**Technical Assistance Activities.** OFA project officers provide grantees with technical assistance needed to manage their grants. Through continuous analysis of performance and identification of strengths and areas for improvement the NHMRC/OFA TA team provides targeted responses to individual grantees. In addition a wide variety of technical assistance activities are designed to help grantees achieve their goals and improve their performance. These fit broadly into two categories:

- (i) Assistance provided, or offered, to all grantees or specific groups of grantees such as roundtable meetings, webinars, mini-conferences/summits, site exchanges, and written products;
- (ii) On a limited basis, individualized assistance is generally provided on site, upon specific request of a grantee or suggestion by a project officer. This TA is managed and provided by members of the NHMRC Team.

In addition the NHMRC Team has set up a Community of Practice (CoP) which is a password protected, electronic space which provides OFA grantees with a forum to exchange ideas and learn from each other, and promotes continuous collaboration and problem solving. The CoP gives its members access to a large media library containing radio and television commercials, flyers and brochures, a calendar of upcoming events, and handouts of presentations. It also facilitates communication between OFA and NHMRC staff to assist grantees in fulfilling reporting requirements and so forth.

**Evaluation Activities.** ACF has also invested substantial dollars in a two-pronged evaluation strategy including both process (qualitative) and outcome (impact) evaluations as follows:

- (i) James Bell Associates was awarded the HM & RF evaluation contract by OFA. They offer technical assistance on evaluation to grantees upon request. They have provided four evaluation roundtable meetings for grantees to focus on evaluation issues, presented numerous evaluation related seminars at grantee meetings, and presented training webinars. In addition JBA conducts research on behalf of OFA and in this regard has prepared six reports and publications for grantees focused on promising practices in healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood OFA grant programs, and effective evaluation strategies. In FY 2010 they will develop two major reports on evaluation and evidenced based practices in HM and RF programs and will also develop the final reporting template for HM and RF grantees to submit at the end of the funding period.
- (ii) A process evaluation of the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative (HHMI) is being conducted as a joint effort between the Administration for Children (ACF) and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for

Planning and Evaluation (ASPE). The HHMI is building interest in and capacity to provide culturally relevant marriage education to Hispanics nationwide as part of the Federal Healthy Marriage Initiative. However, little is known about how such programs effectively reach and serve Hispanic families. Therefore, ACF and ASPE, in partnership with the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative leadership, contracted with The Lewin Group and its subcontractors, MDRC and the University of Houston School of Social Work, to conduct a five year implementation evaluation. The evaluation will examine the ways in which healthy marriage grantees are developing, adapting and implementing culturally relevant and appropriate healthy marriage programs for Hispanic populations. Specifically, the evaluation will:

- Document the diverse programmatic approaches being implemented by a sample of healthy marriage grantees serving Hispanic families;
- Identify the lessons learned in implementing these approaches; and
- Generate hypotheses about which approaches and practices appear most promising.

Up to ten evaluation sites will be selected representing a variety of program approaches. The evaluation will entail extensive qualitative and quantitative data collection. Field research will include program staff and key stakeholder interviews, participant focus groups, reviews of curricula and observation of program activities. The evaluation team will develop practice briefs and presentations describing key findings at each stage of the evaluation and a final report will be prepared describing results of the analysis, recommendations for further research, and assessment and appropriateness of variables, measures and methods used to study program implementation. Evaluation findings will be broadly disseminated to marriage education providers, Hispanic-focused organizations, policymakers at all levels, the research community, and foundations.

(iii) The Office of Planning Research and Evaluation (OPRE), ACF has funded three rigorously designed, longitudinal impact evaluations of multi-site healthy marriage demonstration programs targeting three types of populations and activities: services for low-income unmarried couples who are pregnant or have a baby less than three months old (Building Strong Families, BSF); services for low-income married families (Supporting Healthy Marriage, SHM), and comprehensive community wide healthy marriage initiatives (CHMI). (*These studies are described in more detail in the following section of this report*). The implementation findings and impact results from these “flagship” evaluations are expected to provide useful early lessons for healthy marriage grantees whose activities are aligned with these three demonstration program models, as well as general lessons for other types of healthy marriage services.

## Part III: The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) Healthy Relationship and Marriage Research Projects, 2002- 2009

The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) in ACF supports research and evaluation focused on increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of ACF programs to improve the economic and social well-being of children and families. Rigorous research and evaluation have been an integral part of the agency's support of demonstrations implementing this new array of services. For additional information and/or available reports go to the OPRE Web site at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/project/strengthFamilyProjects.jsp>

### Multi-Site Evaluations

ACF has launched three large-scale, longitudinal, evaluations of approaches to providing healthy relationship and marriage education and support services. Two of these evaluations involve experimental and control groups and the third utilizes matched comparison areas. They evaluate demonstration programs operated by varied types of host organizations at the state and local level in multiple communities across the country.

**Building Strong Families (BSF).** The basis for the BSF project comes from three fields of prior research. One finds that children raised by both their biological parents have better outcomes, on average, than those raised in single-parent families. The second finds that the break-up rate is high even among unwed parents who at the time their child is born desire to stay together or marry. And the third finds that relationship and marriage education services have increased positive outcomes for some groups. The BSF project utilized prior research to develop a demonstration model that includes relationship and marriage education and support services for interested, romantically involved unwed parents. The model is being implemented and evaluated in seven sites.

The BSF project entails three major components: providing technical assistance to program sites to implement the research-based model, analyzing program implementation, and conducting impact analysis based on an experimental design in which interested couples are randomly assigned to a program group that receives BSF services or to a control group that does not. This project is an important opportunity to learn whether well-designed programs and services can increase the quality and stability of couple relationships or marriages and improve outcomes for children, among other measures.

The seven programs in the evaluation are located in Atlanta, GA, Baltimore, MD, Baton Rouge, LA, Orange and Broward counties, FL, Allen, Marion and Lake counties, IN, Oklahoma City, OK, and San Antonio and Houston, TX. Reports on the early implementation challenges and experiences in the demonstration programs and various issue briefs are available at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/build\\_fam/index.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/build_fam/index.html) or [www.buildingstrongfamilies.info](http://www.buildingstrongfamilies.info). Another implementation evaluation report is expected to be available in 2009 and findings on the interim impacts at 15 months following enrollment are expected to be available in early 2010 with final results based on 36-month follow-up available in 2011.

**Contractor.** Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. **Project Period.** September 29, 2002 to December 31, 2011.

**Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM).** Research indicates that lower-income married couples separate and divorce at higher rates than higher income couples, resulting in poorer outcomes for children. The SHM study will evaluate a research-based model designed to help interested lower-income married couples strengthen and maintain their marriages with the goal of improving outcomes for both parents and children. The project involves working in partnership with a variety of types of agencies, providing technical assistance in the design and implementation of programs following the SHM model, analyzing program implementation and conducting impact analysis based on an experimental design in which interested couples are randomly assigned to a program group that receives SHM services or to a control group that does not. The eight programs in the evaluation are located in: Orlando, FL, Wichita, KS, Bronx, NY, Oklahoma City, OK, Bethlehem and Reading, PA, San Antonio and El Paso, TX, Seattle, WA, and Shoreline, WA. Working papers related to the project are available at: [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/support\\_hlthymarr/index.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/support_hlthymarr/index.html) | or [www.supportinghealthymarriage.org](http://www.supportinghealthymarriage.org). A report on the eight programs and their early implementation experiences and lessons is expected to be available by the end of 2009. A report on interim impacts is expected in 2012 and on longer-term impacts in 2013.

**Contractor:** MDRC. **Project Period:** September 30, 2003 to September 29, 2013.

**Community Healthy Relationship and Marriage Education Evaluation** (formerly referred to as the CHMI evaluation). This evaluation includes two components. The first involves implementation evaluations of about 14 healthy relationship and marriage education services demonstrations funded through the Office of Child Support Enforcement Section 1115 authority that aim to involve multiple community partners and, ultimately, improve child support and child outcomes, among other measures. The second component is an impact evaluation that will compare outcomes at the community level in three “treatment” sites (that received federal grants to support services to a large segment of their community) to outcomes in matched comparison sites that have limited healthy relationship and marriage education services in the community. The treatment sites and their respective comparison sites are: Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas, St. Louis and Kansas City, MO, and Milwaukee, WI and Cleveland, OH. Reports on the implementation experience of five Section 1115 demonstrations are available at: [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/eval\\_com/index.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/eval_com/index.html) or [www.rti.org](http://www.rti.org). Additional implementation reports on the Section 1115 demonstrations will be added in 2010. Findings from the impact evaluation are expected to be available in 2011.

**Contractor:** RTI International. **Project Period:** September 30, 2003 to September 29, 2011.

## Other Related Research Contracts

**Exploration of Low-Income Couples’ Decision-Making Processes.** While much has been documented about the interactions and decision processes among higher income couples, there has been little research on the dynamics of low-income couple decision making and the implications for important decisions such as those related to (a) seeking, obtaining, and advancing in employment; (b) living arrangements and relationship status (e.g. marriage/cohabitation); (c) child bearing; (d) child care arrangements; and (e) negotiating and determining parental roles and responsibilities.

**Contractor:** Mathematica Policy Research. **Project period:** Sept 30, 2007 to Sept. 30, 2009.



**The Marriage Calculator.** This project supported the development and maintenance of a Marriage Calculator, an interactive system that applied relevant tax and state-specific public assistance program rules and allowed a user to input information about a family's income and assets, the number, sex, age, and parentage of the children, and their decisions to participate (if eligible) in a variety of public assistance programs to compute the net income of the family under four potential living arrangements: (1) living apart; (2) cohabiting, but not reporting their cohabitation; (3) cohabiting and reporting their cohabitation to government benefit programs; or (4) married.

**Contractor:** The Urban Institute. **Project Period:** September 30, 2007 to September 30, 2008.

**Marriage, Employment, and Family Functioning: Conceptual Framework for Interventions.** This exploratory study synthesized research relevant to decision-making and behavior about marriage, family formation, employment and earnings and family time use with a focus on low-income populations and provided a conceptual framework for further research on these interrelated aspects of family and work life.

**Contractor:** The Urban Institute. **Project Period:** September 30, 2005 to March 31, 2008.

**Options for Collecting Marriage and Divorce Statistics.** This project was jointly sponsored by ACF and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), with cooperation from the National Center for Health Statistics and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. The study analyzed options for improving the collection of marriage and divorce statistics at the federal, state, and local levels.

**Contractor:** The Lewin Group. **Project Period:** September 30, 2003 to September 29, 2008.

## Related Research Grants

**Ethnographic and Survey Studies of the Determinants of Healthy Marriage.** This project analyzed data addressing multiple areas including low-income women's attitudes toward motherhood and marriage, the role of trust in low-income mothers' intimate unions, and intimate partner relationships among low-income Puerto Rican mothers.

**Grantee:** Johns Hopkins University. **Project Period:** September 30, 2005 to March 31, 2008.

**Researching Recruitment Challenges in Low-Income Marriage Education Programs.** This project explores recruitment barriers of low income couples to marriage skills education both from couple and marriage education practitioner samples. It synthesizes current recruitment practices of marriage education programs, and measures communication, problem solving abilities and stress levels among low-income and middle-income couples.

**Grantee:** Oklahoma State University. **Project Period:** September 30, 2005 to September 29, 2009.

**Efficacy of Program for Strong African American Marriage.** This impact study examines the effectiveness of Pro SAAM, a marriage education program designed for low-income, rural African American married couples on such outcomes as marital satisfaction and stability, examining forgiveness, commitment and intentions are

mediators of program effects.

**Grantee:** Florida State University. **Project Period:** September 30, 2005 to September 29, 2009.

**A Longitudinal Study of the Impact of Relationship Education among Low-Income, Ethnically Diverse Youth.** This impact study examines the effects of a healthy relationship educational course taught in high schools in Alabama on a range of outcomes such as knowledge and beliefs about healthy and unhealthy relationships, relationship abuse, and cohabitation and marriage; skills and knowledge related to problem solving and conflict management in relationships; and experience perpetrating or being a victim of verbal or physical aggression.

**Grantee:** Auburn University. **Project Period:** September 30, 2005 to September 29, 2010.

**Gendered Parenting and Its Implications for Child Wellbeing and Couple Relationships.** The focus of this research was to assess the state of social and natural sciences on gender differences in parenting and their consequences for child well-being and marital, as well as non-marital, relationships, assessing where fathers and mothers have strengths and weaknesses as parents and how couples can build on gender differences.

**Grantee:** Rutgers University, The Marriage Project. **Project Period:** July 1, 2006 to March 31, 2008.

**Using Marriage Education to Foster Investment in Fatherhood: A Long-Term Comparison of Individual vs. Couple Level Treatment.** This project will assess the effectiveness of an 8-week marriage education curriculum designed for low-income individuals and couples in promoting investment in relationships by fathers and positive parenting outcomes. The evaluation will assess whether efficacy of the treatment depends on whether couples or individuals participate

**Grantee:** University of Denver. **Project period:** Sept 30, 2006 to Sept. 29, 2011.

**Couples Together Against Violence.** This project will assess the effectiveness of the marriage education curriculum entitled *Couples Together Against Violence* in reducing low-level situational violence, strengthening marriage/relationships, and increasing father involvement. The evaluation will aim to identify the mechanisms responsible for decreases in low-level situational violence.

**Grantee:** Relationship Research Institute. **Project period:** Sept 30, 2006 to Sept. 29, 2011.

**Strong African American Fathers in Healthy Marriages: A Randomized Controlled Trial with Rural Families.** This project will assess the effectiveness of the curriculum entitled Program for Strong African American Fathers, a course of 6 in-home sessions for married couples focused on marriage and parenting. The evaluation will assess the program's effect on African American fathers living in rural Georgia in strengthening marriage and increasing father involvement.

**Grantee:** University of Georgia. **Project period:** Sept 30, 2006 to Sept. 29, 2011.

## Healthy Marriage Related Research Activities funded by Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, DHHS 2003--2009

### **National Center for Family and Marriage Research**

**Organization:** Bowling Green State University, Ohio

The National Center for Family and Marriage Research is an academic based research center funded for five years through a cooperative agreement with Bowling Green State University. The Center plays a leadership role in building the research base on marriage and family structure. The Center provides intellectual leadership to stimulate and support the academic community nationwide to meet current policy research needs, and identify innovative strategies for future study, in the areas of family structure and function. To build the field and develop new scholars, the Center conducts research seminars, data training workshops and conferences, and runs an annual small grant programs. They train and mentor junior faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate assistants. The web site features research integrating visually appealing “data points,” research training materials, working papers, and regular updates on new research. The Center also builds data infrastructure by giving researchers the opportunity to pilot survey questions, producing family structure measurement guidelines, investing in family and marriage data modules, and promoting the collection of key indicators of marriage and family stability.

### **Evaluation of ACF Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Re-entering Fathers and Their Partners**

**Organization:** RTI International

This project is conducting an implementation and impact evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the 12 grants funded by the Office of Family Assistance/ Administration for Children and Families that provide marriage and family strengthening services to fathers who are incarcerated (or recently released) and their partners. 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 document program implementation, challenges, successes, and lessons learned; to determine the impact of these diverse programs on outcomes such as marital stability, positive family interactions, family financial well-being, and recidivism; and to identify the mediation mechanisms (or primary pathways) through which these programs achieve success. This evaluation will add to research, policy, and practice by helping to determine what types of programs work best for those involved in the criminal justice system, what does not work, and what effects these programs may have on fostering healthy marriages, families, and children.

**Ongoing, Year Funded:** 2006

- The National Evaluation of the Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Re-Entering Fathers and Their Partners, Program Overview and Evaluation Summary, Research Brief #1.
- The National Evaluation of the Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Re-Entering Fathers and Their Partners, Program Overview and Evaluation Summary, Research Brief #2.
- Incarceration and the Family: A Review of Research and Promising Approaches for Serving Fathers and Families.

## **Information for Healthy Marriage Interventions**

**Organization:** Mathematica Policy Research

This project produced three reports on topics related to relationships and marriage:

*“The Effects of Marriage on Health”* synthesizes current research on the relationship between marital status and healthy behaviors, health status and longevity, mental health and substance use, health care access and utilization, and intergenerational health effects. It focuses on relevant U.S. studies that carefully address selection and causality and were published in peer-reviewed journals since 1990.

The second report *“Pathways to Adulthood and Marriage: Teenagers’ Attitudes, Expectations, and Relationship Patterns”* examines potential precursors of the changes in adult marriage patterns in recent decades. It draws on data from four large national surveys to examine the experiences and attitudes of teenagers to gain a better understanding of factors that influence their views of marriage and their relationship choices in adulthood.

The third report, *“The “Marriage Measures Guide of State-Level Statistics”* uses existing national survey and administrative data to identify the characteristics of various target populations for healthy marriage programs at the state level to help put future results from local family strengthening initiatives into appropriate geographic and socio-demographic context

**Published:** 2007 and 2008.

## **Marriage Education, Financial Literacy, and Asset Development**

**Organization:** RTI International

This project convened a Roundtable meeting of a diverse group of experts with research, policy, and practice experience in marriage education, financial literacy, and/or asset development. The meeting provided an opportunity to exchange knowledge and explore collaboration across the fields. The project produced a

summary of the proceedings and two briefs designed to introduce the fields to each other, explore how these issues interact in the lives of families, and examine opportunities for collaboration.

**Published:** 2008-2009.

- Marriage Education, Financial Literacy, and Asset Development Roundtable: Meeting Summary
- Foundations for Strong Families 101: Healthy Relationships and Financial Stability
- Foundations for Strong Families 201: Healthy Relationships and Financial Stability

## **Relationship Strengths in Married Families**

**Organizations:** NORC with subcontractor Child Trends

This study used nationally representative, longitudinal data, the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997 cohort (NLSY-97), to examine how parent marital quality and parent-adolescent relationships in married couple families influence a range of adolescent and youth well-being outcomes. The study also controls for a range of marital, family, adolescent and environmental characteristics in these analyses. The study found that parent-marital quality combined with parent-adolescent relationship quality are related to physical health, mental health, substance use, sexual activity, and religious activity outcomes during middle adolescence and, to a lesser extent, early adulthood. In particular, adolescents who do not have good relationships with **both** of their parents and do not report positive parent marital quality are quite consistently at greater risk for negative well-being outcomes in adolescence and for several outcomes in early adulthood. Seven reports and the study data file are available.

**Published:** 2008-2009

- Marital Quality and Parent-Adolescent Relationships: Effects on Adolescent and Young Adult Well-Being
- Marital Quality and Parent-Adolescent Relationships: Components of Relationship Strengths in Married Couple Families
- Marital Quality and Parent-Adolescent Relationships: Effects on Educational Outcomes for Youth
- Marital Quality and Parent-Adolescent Relationships: Effects on Adolescent Religiosity and Religious Practice
- Marital Quality and Parent-Adolescent Relationships: Effects on Adolescent and Young Adult Health Outcomes
- Marital Quality and Parent-Adolescent Relationships: Effects on Sexual Activity Among Adolescents and Young Adults
- Marital Quality and Outcomes for Children and Adolescents: A Review of the Family Process Literature
- Marital Quality and Parent-Adolescent Relationships: Data Set and Codebook

## **Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI) Process Evaluation**

### **Organization: Mathematica Policy Research**

In the late 1990s the State of Oklahoma, recognizing the economic and social consequences of its high rates of divorce and non-marital childbearing, undertook an innovative strategy to strengthen families. The state initiated an effort to reduce divorce and decrease non-marital childbearing. This pioneering effort became the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI), now the nation's longest running and most comprehensive set of programs to strengthen marriage. A process evaluation of the OMI documented the conception, development, and implementation of the initiative; analyzed the OMI's program strategy in order to understand as well as possible the consequences of the implementation approaches taken, and identified lessons and implications for both the continuation of the OMI and the development of marriage and family strengthening initiatives in other states. The OMI evaluation employed multiple methods for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. Findings are reported in a series of research briefs and a comprehensive final report.

### ***Published:* 2006-2009**

- The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative: A Process Evaluation (Final Report and Research Brief, December 2008)
- The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative: An Overview of the Longest-Running Statewide Marriage Initiative in the U.S. (Research Brief, December 2006)
- Starting Early: How the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative Helps Schools Prepare Young People for Healthy Marriages (Research Brief, June 2008)
- Putting Marriage on the Agenda: How Oklahoma Laid the Foundation for Its Marriage Initiative (Research Brief, July 2008)
- Using Research to Guide the Development of an Evolving Statewide Initiative (Research Brief, July 2008)
- The Promise and Challenge of Using Volunteers to Provide Community-Based Marriage Education (Research Brief, December 2008)
- Marriage and Relationship Skills Education as a Way to Prepare Prisoners for Reintegration (Research Brief, January 2009)

### **Public Assistance Use Among Two Parent Families**

***Authors:*** Anu Rangarajan, Laura Castner and Melissa A. Clark, Mathematica Policy Research

This report describes trends in participation of married and two-parent families in TANF and Food Stamps and the factors related to those trends. Data have shown that participation rates in these programs are typically lower for two-parent families than single-parent families. This project used output from the MATH and TRIM simulation models to examine trends in both eligibility and participation among eligibles for both married parent and all two-parent families. The study also incorporated regression analysis to examine the likely importance

of state-level program rules and economic variables, as well as family and individual characteristics as they influence both eligibility and participation in TANF and Food Stamps. The study found that neither individual family characteristics or state rules appear to explain the difference in participation rates for those eligible for program services.

**Completed, Year Funded:** 2003 **Published:** Jan 2005

### **Advancing Marriage and Health Research**

**Authors:** Robert G. Wood, Brian Goesling, Sarah Avellar, Mathematica Policy Research

This report synthesizes current research on the relationship between marital status and healthy behaviors, health status and longevity, mental health and substance use, health care access and utilization, and intergenerational health effects. It focuses on relevant U.S. studies that carefully address selection and causality and were published in peer-reviewed journals since 1990.

**Published:** June, 2007

### **Marriage and Health in the African American Community**

**Authors:** Brian Goesling and Heather Koball

Previous ASPE research on the relationship between marital status and health indicated that most studies on marriage in health were not able to address whether there were racial and ethnic differences in the findings. This missing information is significant because the marriage patterns and health outcomes of African Americans often differ from those of other racial and ethnic groups. ASPE has contracted with Mathematica Policy Research (MPR) to commission a series of ten papers examining the interaction between marriage and health in the African American community. The papers will increase the understanding of how marriage may be related to physical and mental health in the African American community in the United States and how marital quality and status may be related to health disparities. The papers will be published in a special issue of the Journal of Family Issues in 2010.

In addition, the project also produced a research brief on marital status and health insurance in families with children: Marriage and Health Care Coverage Among Families with Children

**Published:** 2008

## **Impact of Marital and Relationship Status on Social Outcomes for Returning**

**Authors:** Christy Visher, Carly Knight, Aaron Chalfin, & John Roman, Urban Institute

Using data collected from over 650 male former prisoners returning to three large U.S. cities between 2002 and 2005, this study tested the short-term impact of marital and intimate partner status on recidivism, substance use, and employment. After statistically adjusting for self-selection into marriage or into unmarried relationships, the study found that former prisoners who were married or living as married had half the odds of self-reporting a new crime and/or drug use as did those in casual, unmarried relationships. Overall, the findings suggest that in-prison programs that strengthen the quality of partner relationships may reduce recidivism and substance abuse after release.

**Published:** February, 2009

## **Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative (HHMI) Implementation Evaluation**

**Organization:** The Lewin Group, with subcontractors MDRC and The University of Houston School of Social Work

This project will conduct a comprehensive process and outcome evaluation of up to ten ACF Healthy Marriage grantees that serve Hispanic families wholly or in part. The Hispanic population is both the youngest and the fastest growing in the U.S., yet there has been relatively little practice-based research about their distinct strengths, needs. For example, researchers hypothesize that Hispanics place a relatively stronger value on family, parenting, and kinship networks—familismo, but there is little guidance on how to operationalize the concept in practice, including within marriage education programs. The evaluation will systematically identify opportunities and challenges in working with Hispanic populations; analyze implementation and outcome data across sites; and describe how concepts used in healthy marriage education programs are being defined, adapted and measured for Latino sub-populations and assess appropriateness and relevance. This project is jointly funded and managed by ASPE and ACF.

**Ongoing, Year Funded:** 2007

## **National, State and Local Levels**

**Organization:** The Lewin Group, with subcontractor Urban Institute

ACF, in partnership with ASPE, conducted a study to explore options for the collection of marriage and divorce statistics at the national, state and local levels. Rationale for the project was that available marriage and divorce data, including event data from states' vital registrars and national survey data, are incomplete



or of inconsistent quality and that existing data are not adequate to meet the needs of researchers, program planners, or policy makers. The project included the examination of: (1) current and potential vital statistics and survey data collection methods; (2) data quality and data infrastructure issues at the national, state and local levels; and (3) the needs of a variety of types of users of marriage and divorce data. The products include information from a national survey on marriage and divorce vital statistics, selected site visits to examine the use of technology to support the collection, storage and use of vital statistics data information; a review of surveys that collect information on marriage and divorce; and a policy brief on new marriage and divorce data collection on the American Community Survey.

**Completed:** 2008

- American Community Survey: New Survey Questions Enable Measurement of Marital Transitions, <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/09/MarriageDivorceStats/ACSBrief/rb.shtml>
- Assessment of Survey Data for the Analysis of Marriage and Divorce at the National, State and Local Levels [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/expl\\_opt/reports/assess\\_survey/assess\\_survey\\_title.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/expl_opt/reports/assess_survey/assess_survey_title.html)
- Collection of Marriage and Divorce, Statistics by States: Final Report, [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/expl\\_opt/reports/coll\\_stats/coll\\_stats\\_title.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/expl_opt/reports/coll_stats/coll_stats_title.html)
- Electronic Collection of Marriage and Divorce Statistics: Findings from Seven States, Final Report [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/expl\\_opt/reports/electronic\\_coll/electronic\\_coll\\_title.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/expl_opt/reports/electronic_coll/electronic_coll_title.html)

**State Marriage and Divorce Vital Statistics Web Tool**

This web tool provides a searchable database from the survey of state-level vital registrars that collected information about marriage and divorce contained in state vital registration systems. This tool allows the user to obtain information about the marriage and divorce information that states collect, how the information is collected, how it is stored, and what information is available to data users and other interested parties. Information about state collection of statistics can be accessed in multiple ways including by specific criteria, an interactive map, and state profiles.

**Available at** [www.statemarriageanddivorcestats.com](http://www.statemarriageanddivorcestats.com)