



BUILDING STRONG FAMILIES IN BALTIMORE

PURPOSE Implement and test intervention to help expecting and new unwed parents (18 and older) strengthen their couple relationship and form and sustain healthy marriage (if they choose to wed), with ultimate goal of enhancing prospects for their child's development

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Marriage/Relationship Skills Workshops: Weekly group sessions serving 5-8 couples at a time, over a period of 4-5 months, led by professionally qualified facilitators. Curriculum focuses on developing skills, not therapy or counseling. Workshops deal with how to communicate as a couple, preserve intimacy and friendship, build commitment and trust, prevent conflict escalation, work productively together as parents, and develop strong relationships with the child.

Family Support Services: Linkages to improve access of couples to services that address personal and circumstantial problems that can affect relationships, such as employment, transportation, housing, childcare substance/alcohol abuse, mental health.

Family Coordinator: Staff, who promotes attendance at workshops, reinforces attention to skills learned in workshops, identify couples' service needs, and link them to available services at CFUF and elsewhere.



H O U S E O F R U T H
M A R Y L A N D

The House Of Ruth Maryland is the area's largest and most comprehensive domestic violence program offering services for victims, their children, friends and family, teens, and abusers. Since opening its doors in 1977, the agency has served over 100,000 victims of domestic violence, providing assistance to 13,000 victims of domestic violence and their families in 2007 alone. House Of Ruth Maryland has been identified as a leader in the area of protocol development and service recommendations for Healthy Relationship & Marriage Programs and Responsible Fatherhood Programs and serve as the partner for several federally funded programs in Maryland and have consulted with several programs across the country. The Program Manager of the agency's abuser intervention program currently serves as the domestic violence expert for a national technical assistance organization, Women In Fatherhood, Inc.

The House Of Ruth Maryland's services include:

- 24 Hour Hotline
- Community Advocates who work in the community with victims in crisis
- Emergency Shelter with 23 private rooms for women and children in imminent danger; six transitional apartments and supportive services
- Legal Clinic services providing free legal advice and representation in securing Protective/Peace Orders ; divorce and custody
- Individual and group counseling, therapy and case management services for women, children and youth
- A teen school-based educational program to assist youth involved in dating violence and stop the cycle of violence
- Therapeutic services for children of victims through our comprehensive Children's Program
- School and community-based prevention programs for children to change their social norms and teach skills for healthy interactions and problem-solving
- Abuser Intervention which provides psycho-educational programs for those who are emotionally, physically, or sexually abusing their partner; assists and educates victims to ensure their safety.

CFUF and HOUSE OF RUTH PARTNERSHIP HISTORY

The Center for Urban Families (CFUF) and the House Of Ruth Maryland (HRM) have been collaborating as far back as 1998 through service delivery as well as on funding applications and protocol development. The agencies developed their first Memorandum of Understanding in March of 2001 as part of the *Family & Community Violence Prevention Project*, which was supported by the Ford Foundation, the Center for Impact Research, and the National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership. This project required CFUF to incorporate domestic violence screening tools in their standard Intake and incorporate domestic violence prevention material into their fatherhood programming. HRM agreed to refer its court-referred client base to CFUF's employment program and conduct a series of domestic violence workshops for CFUF staff and clients.

In 2003, HRM redesigned its abuser intervention program and consulted with CFUF staff to explore ways to engage men in services voluntarily. In 2004 the HRM's Gateway Project and CFUF's Men's Services Program co-sponsored the "Men's Speak Out Against Domestic & Community Violence" with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. This event served as a kick-off for support groups jointly sponsored by House Of Ruth Maryland and Center for Urban Families. The goals of the groups were to help men build healthy relationships in their homes and communities.

Despite the lack of public support funds, the House Of Ruth Maryland and the Center for Urban Families continue to offer services for shared clients free of charge.

SUCSESSES

Clearly the partnership between the Center for Urban Families and the House Of Ruth Maryland is one of the most longstanding partnerships in the country. CFUF was one of the first agencies in the country to seek out a domestic violence partner and develop domestic violence protocols. Over time the two organizations have been able to provide technical assistance to several other programs looking for similar collaborations.

CHALLENGES

- Staff turnover in both agencies have made it difficult to sustain specific programs and move work plans forward. As each agency struggles to maintain and improve the quality of current programming, new initiative and enhancements becoming challenging.
- Domestic violence screening tools used during intakes often do not capture domestic violence issues. While some couples can identify with words like "conflict" or "argument", they will rarely self-identify with issues of domestic violence. Control and violence concern only become apparent after clients have developed a strong relationship with the CFUF staff and possibly other couples in the program. This results in a reluctance to go to another agency for services if domestic violence is identified.