



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Aug. 24, 2010

CONTACT:
Communications Department
405-848-2171

Rigorous federal study shows Oklahoma's Family Expectations program strengthens new parents' relationships and helps families stay together

Oklahoma program achieves national recognition based on study findings released today

OKLAHOMA CITY — Family Expectations today released a comprehensive research report based on a large, rigorous federal study of effectiveness. The study findings showed that unmarried parents giving birth to a child benefited in numerous ways from their participation the Oklahoma City-based service. As part of a groundbreaking national study called Building Strong Families (BSF), couples who participated in Oklahoma's Family Expectations program were more likely to stay together, reported higher quality relationships and had fathers who were more likely to remain involved with their children as compared to the control group. In addition to helping hundreds of Oklahoma families, Family Expectations promises to impact national human services policy due to the strength of the findings from the study on the Oklahoma program. The Family Expectations program offers public policy leaders committed to strengthening vulnerable families a new strategy and fresh encouragement that low-income families can be substantially aided in achieving their own aspirations for stability and happiness.

Parents participating in Family Expectations were offered access to this new, innovative program designed to provide support to financially vulnerable families during a key life transition: birth. Each received 30 hours of relationship education and parenting information in a group setting, with 75 percent of the parents beginning their workshops during pregnancy. The remaining couples joined the program prior to their child reaching three months of age. Parents also were provided access to ancillary activities designed to reinforce curriculum concepts, continue their education on a wide range of topics and facilitate the development of social bonds within their peer group. Finally, each couple was

provided a Family Support Coordinator to meet in one-on-one sessions designed to reinforce the curriculum and address other family needs through referrals. While both married and unmarried couples participate in Family Expectations, only the unmarried couples are involved in the BSF study. (The married couples are in another study: Supporting Healthy Marriages.)

Mathematica Policy Research, one of the nation's most respected human services research firms, was on-site at Family Expectations today to release its latest research report: *15-Month Impacts of Oklahoma's Family Expectations Program*. Barbara Devaney, Ph.D., co-principal investigator of BSF and an author of the Oklahoma-specific report, presented findings that demonstrate a consistent pattern of positive impacts across a range of outcomes for couples participating in Family Expectations. This rigorous, random assignment study found that positive impacts of Family Expectations were especially strong among African American couples.

Scott Stanley, Ph.D., co-chair of the program's Research Advisory Group and a research professor at the University of Denver, said the findings demonstrate that the Family Expectations model works. He also noted that the strength and rigor of the procedures employed in Oklahoma make it possible that other states and organizations can replicate the model. Because the research used a random assignment methodology and a very diverse sample of couples who usually do not have access to such services, the results offer a great deal of support to the belief that vulnerable new families can be strengthened at a critical time of transition.

"Having been a part of Family Expectation's Research Advisory group since the program's inception, it's a privilege to be here today to celebrate with Oklahomans about the remarkable significance of what has occurred," Stanley said. "The positive findings from this report on the BSF study in Oklahoma are strong and highly encouraging."

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services has been a partner with the federal government in this research effort from inception, and Howard Hendrick, Cabinet Secretary of Human Services, provided context for the study's results.

"Given the continued growth in the nation's out-of-wedlock birthrate, now more than 40 percent of all births, this research shows that unmarried couples who participate in this intervention have significantly improved relationship stability, especially for less educated and lower income families," Hendrick said. "This has significant importance for helping to reduce the risks of children being reared in single parent households, where the risks of poverty are significantly higher."

Family Expectations served 503 Oklahoma City couples during the study period from June 2006 through March 2008. Participating couples received up to 30

hours of relationship education in the core curriculum, plus numerous additional educational opportunities.

“We knew from our previous work at the Becoming Parents Program that pregnancy is a highly teachable moment, and Family Expectations took that knowledge and did something significant. It's been remarkable to watch these Oklahoma parents learn key concepts for keeping their families healthy throughout the development and implementation of this program,” said Pam Jordan, Ph.D., author of the Becoming Parents curriculum used by Family Expectations. “Couples in these group sessions learn how to work cooperatively to build a safe and stable home for their new babies, learning core competencies such as respectful communication, problem solving, infant cues and responsible parenting.”

Family Expectations team members celebrated the results, but also were quick to add that the program has continued to improve since the last couple entered into the BSF-Oklahoma study more than two years ago.

“Our program is stronger today than it was during the BSF-Oklahoma time period, as parents today are participating in even more hours of direct service, our staff has gained additional competency from program maturity and the couples themselves have led us to a wide-range of program improvements,” said Family Expectations Program Director David Kimmel.

Family Expectations began participating in the BSF research study in June 2006, and the last couple entered the research sample in February 2008. Just more than 1,000 couples are included in the Oklahoma research sample (approximately half were randomly assigned to receive the Family Expectations program and half were randomly assigned to a control group that was followed over time, but did not receive Family Expectations). The impact results were long-coming as the research follow-up data was not collected until the parents reached the 15-month mark following intake into the program.

“It's been hard work and long days for many years now on behalf of some of Oklahoma's most vulnerable families, and there were certainly many times, while waiting for the results, where our team wondered if the researchers would find what we believed we saw every day: families being positively impacted,” said Mary Myrick, President of Public Strategies, the firm responsible for developing and implementing Family Expectations in Oklahoma. “But it was worth every minute to find out now that the work we do every day has been having a positive effect on our state's families and children. It's a privilege to be in this position, and we're grateful that our research team has put us in the place where we can now serve these new parents with the greatest of confidence that what we do truly matters in people's lives.”

Family Expectations is one of eight sites nationwide participating in the large scale national evaluation of Building Strong Families, a federally funded study of programs for unmarried families. The program model is designed to improve family outcomes and child well-being by teaching unmarried parents in couple relationships how to communicate better, resolve conflicts constructively and develop stronger, healthier and long-lasting relationships.

“Family Expectations taught us many things, some we didn’t have any idea we needed to know,” Family Expectations participants Adriana and Jeffrey said. “We thought our relationship was great, but the things we learned have made it stronger.”

**To arrange an interview, contact
the communications department at 405-848-2171.**

###