

Oklahoma Marriage Initiative: Marriage and Relationship Education and TANF Program Highlight

The marriage and relationship education field strives to equip couples and individuals with skills to foster healthy relationships with the ultimate goal of promoting child well-being. The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI), and others like it, are partnering with an array of social service systems such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to extend their reach to individuals and couples these systems touch. Lessons are emerging about how such partnerships can be successfully forged and the benefits for the service systems as well as their clients. This Program Highlight discusses the partnership between the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative and the local Oklahoma City TANF offices.

Program Mission:

To provide marriage and relationship education to Oklahomans, both couples and individuals, specific to the needs of numerous populations

Background:

The OMI began in 1999 as a statewide, governor-supported effort funded by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS). Prior to 2005, OMI had been providing relationship education to married and engaged couples. The partnership began when OMI wanted to expand its reach by engaging low-income parents. In 2005, the program was involved in developing a new relationship education curriculum for low-income and disadvantaged individuals. OMI and TANF officials developed plans for the delivery of relationship education during weekly orientations that all TANF clients are required to attend as a pre-requisite for receiving benefits.

Program Highlights:

1. *Relationships* – OMI has built and maintained relationships with five local county TANF offices, which ultimately decide what programming to offer at their locations. As a result of these partnerships, TANF staff members have been trained to deliver relationship education programming and are very supportive of the service. Additionally, successful implementation has paved the way for the inclusion of child welfare families to the workshops offered on-site.
2. *Creativity* – DHS budget cuts in 2011 jeopardized the instruction that OMI was providing at local TANF offices. However, OMI and TANF staff worked together to solve the budget problem. By moving orientation classes from five offices to one central location the offices have saved money on staffing and have created new systems for keeping TANF clients engaged in much-needed services.
3. *Accountability* – OMI and TANF have collaborated on data reporting to assess the implementation and impact of OMI programs. TANF employees that facilitate relationship instruction have diligently ensured that participants complete all necessary forms and surveys.

For more information:

To learn more about the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, call 405-848-2171.