

Participant Program Descriptions



Family Expectations (FE) is a comprehensive, couple-based intervention for lower-income expectant or new parents, located in Oklahoma City. FE participates in two, federal funded, national evaluations: Building Strong Families and Supporting Healthy Marriage. The goal of the program is to increase family wellbeing by helping expectant pregnant couples strengthen their relationships and continues until the child reaches one year of age. The program duration is approximately 15 months, as it begins during pregnancy or three months post-birth, and helps young parents be well-equipped to handle the stressors that will likely accompany their growing family.

The core of the program is an intense workshop schedule that the couple, both mom and dad, attend together. The workshops address issues such as healthy communication, anger and stress management, baby care, child development, and the importance of preserving couple time. After the baby is born, couples attend follow-up or “booster” sessions. These sessions refresh couple communication skills and provide new information on child development and sustaining healthy relationships. Another couple support in the program is the access to a Family Support Coordinator who works collaboratively with couples to identify strengths and needs, provide information and referrals, and help couples integrate communication tools learned in the workshops into their daily life.

Building Strong Families

Family Expectations has been selected to participate in a national research evaluation for low-income, *unwed* expectant or new parents. The Building Strong Families (BSF) project, funded by the Administration for Children and Families, is managed by a Princeton, NJ based research company, Mathematica Policy Research (MPR). As a BSF participant, Family Expectations has the opportunity to analyze the impacts of this relationship education program on couples who are currently growing their families.

Healthy Marriage Strong Families & Child Wellbeing

Couples eligible for participation in the BSF study must be over the age of 18, in a committed relationship and currently pregnant or with a child under the age of 3 months. Although every couple meeting the eligibility requirements will participate in the BSF study, only 50% will have the opportunity to take part in the Family Expectations program. Participating in a national research project requires a higher level of impact analysis and this is accomplished through the use of a control group and a program group. Control group participants are given information regarding resources in the community and are interviewed by MPR representatives at different stages of the project. Program group participants attend marriage education workshops, are assigned to a Family Support Coordinator, and also engage in on-going education activities.

Though the focus of the BSF study is designed to support healthy marriages the program is sensitive to the needs of every couple. For program participants interested in marriage the focus of this project will be on achieving a healthy marriage and, for those couples who do not marry, the program will encourage the development and maintenance of a positive relationship.

Supporting Healthy Marriage

In addition to participating in the Building Strong Families project, Family Expectations has been selected as the only location in the country to participate in both the BSF and the Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM) programs. SHM is a project funded by the Administration for Children and Families and is managed by MDRC, a research firm based in New York City. Similar to BSF, SHM is a national research project designed to promote healthy marriages. Nationally, SHM's target population is lower-income *married* couples with at least one child. In the FE program, the target population has been aligned with the BSF project and serves married couples expecting a baby or with a child under the age of three months.

BALTIMORE BUILDING STRONG FAMILIES

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.

Service Provider

Center for Urban Families (CFUF), formerly the Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce 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 promote attendance at workshops, reinforce attention to skills learned in workshops, identify couples' service needs, and link them to available services at CFUF and elsewhere.

Key Outcomes: Couples' relationship status and relationship quality, couples' and parents' economic success (employment and well-being) and health status, children's emotional and cognitive development.