

National Healthy Marriage Resource Center
Healthy Marriage Programs: Opportunities to Partner with Courts
Moderator: Rich Batten
March 31, 2011

Operator: Please stand by. Good day and welcome to the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center's March webinar conference call. Today's conference is being recorded. At this time, it is my pleasure to turn the conference over to our moderator for today, Mr. Rich Batten. Please go ahead, sir.

Rich Batten: Thank you. Good afternoon. Again, welcome to the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center's webinar entitled: "Healthy Marriage Programs: Opportunities to Partner with Courts." I'm the NHMRC Program Manager and I will be facilitating today's webinar.

Courts deal with a range of people who could benefit from relationship education. Couples filing for divorce, parents involved in the child support system, and youth who are processed for misdemeanors, as well as felonies, are among those who can be served in this way.

Some Healthy Marriage programs have developed fruitful partnerships with court administrators and/or judges to facilitate voluntary referral. The speakers on today's webinar will discuss the potential benefits of such partnerships, how they can be established, how the court-referred participants are profiting from healthy marriage program participation and the like.

So with that, let's move on to a brief introduction of our experts. We'll have Alicia Davis, J.D., Principal Court Management Consultant for the National Center for State Courts; Lynda Williams, a Drug Court Coordinator in Dallas County, Texas; and Ann Bruce, Program Manager for Building Healthy Marriages, Weld County, Colorado.

A few housekeeping notes before we do get started: This webinar is being recorded. The recording and all presentation materials including the Q&A session from the webinar will be posted on the NHMRC Web site about a week, seven to nine business days, following today's presentation.

With the webinar technology, you'll be able to submit questions during each presentation and Jillian Scollan will explain that process to you at this time. Jill.

Jillian Scollan: Thanks, Rich. Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to direct your attention to the demonstration slide that's displayed on your screen. You should find the Questions and Answer pane designated by the letters Q&A located at the top left portion of your screen. You can click on that portion of the Menu bar to open the pane or you can open and then drag the pane off the Menu bar.

To ask a question this afternoon, we request that you type your question into the top box, click the Ask button, and then you will automatically receive a reply thanking you for your question and it frees this up to ask another question if you choose. Thank you very much, Rich.

Rich Batten: And at the end of the, of all of the presentations, I will facilitate a 20- to 25-minute Q&A based on the questions that you submitted. So you can submit them at any time. However, we will not address the questions until after all of the presentations have been made.

With that, I'm pleased to welcome our first presenter. Alicia Davis has, Ms. Davis has worked for the State Court Administrator's offices in Colorado and in Utah.

In Colorado, she oversaw a judicial program, which serves as a clearinghouse of community-focused court planning resources, particularly in the areas of juvenile and family law, probate law

and alternative dispute resolution. Principal among her responsibilities was to work with judges across the state to identify available community resources for families in crisis.

As the Assistant Juvenile Court Administrator in Utah, Ms. Davis helped to develop practices intended to aid courts in being more effective, efficient and responsive to the needs of court-involved families. She holds a J.D. from the S.J. Quinney School of Law at the University of Utah.

Did I pronounce that right, Quinney?

Alicia Davis: You did, you did.

Rich Batten: And a bachelor's from the University of California at Santa Barbara. Ms. Davis will start our presentation this afternoon by discussing the types of cases the courts could refer to Healthy Marriage programs, how program managers can establish partnerships with the courts and how approaches for forming these partnerships will vary by state to state. Alicia, take it away.

Alicia Davis: Well thank you so much, Rich. I really appreciate the opportunity to participate on this call. I think that the Healthy Marriage partnerships are a tremendous resource.

And I want to talk about that a little bit from the perspective of someone recently coming from a couple of court systems, both in Colorado and Utah, and also as a person being familiar with the court community and how precious and scarce resources are right now, especially resources like the ones that we're talking about, the Healthy Marriage partnerships.

In a time, in a budget climate where many courts are operating at 10% - in some cases more, in some states more - 10% reduced staffing levels and also just a time that we're all familiar with where resources have been cut, the types of classes or programs that may have been more readily available a few years ago have been cut.

I can't underscore how important these services are that you provide. If we could start with the first slide please. I currently, having worked in the administrative offices of the courts in both Colorado and Utah for the last 12 years, I'm recently with the National Center for State Courts.

For those of you who aren't familiar with the work that the National Center does, the National Center is widely regarded across the country throughout the administrative offices of the courts as a clearinghouse of information.

And is a place that a lot of court administrators and judges turn to when they're looking for information about how to run their processes and how to address some of the difficult types of cases that we'll be focusing on today, some of those difficult types of cases that are, that could not be a better fit for the types of classes and programs that you as providers are able to offer.

So the mission of the National Center of the State Courts is to improve the administration of justice through leadership and service to state courts and courts around the world. The reason that I've provided the Web site here is because I think that you may find it useful within your individual community.

I'll go through a little bit later on and show you where there is some information about your local jurisdiction that you can reference in case, so when you do get to the point of wanting to make some outreach to a local court, to a local judicial officer or to a court administrator, it'll give you a little bit more insight about the wonderful world of courts, which if you, if it's a place that you haven't had the opportunity to be very involved, as most people really haven't, then it gives you a little bit of insight into that world.

Next slide, please. So as Rich was saying, the things that we'll be discussing will be the types of cases that family courts, and I'm going to focus on family courts here, that could refer to Healthy

Marriage programs and how those programs can go about forming partnerships with the courts or with particular judges.

And in, we'll also talk a little bit about how really, and this probably isn't any surprise, how every community is very unique in terms of their court system. We'll talk a little bit more about some of those distinctions.

The most promising cases are on the next slide, if we can go there please. In thinking through this and also having sat in the seat of being, of, you know, being in the seat and hearing from different judges about, oh, this is, you know, we need to, we are often placed in the difficult position of having a family come before us.

And that, you know, and again, we'll be referring specifically to family courts and to juvenile court. I think there are definitely, there is definitely a place for Healthy Marriage programs in other jurisdictions, but in terms of, you know, the ones where you're most likely to make an impact we'll stay with those courts.

I've heard from so many judges that in these cases that we've listed here, legal separation, divorce and dissolution, truancy, delinquency cases, juvenile delinquency cases and then child abuse or dependence, or what they're normally called, dependency and neglect cases within the courts.

Those are all areas that I think judicial officers would really welcome your assistance and being more familiar, being more aware of what it is exactly that you provide, so some of these may seem a little bit odd. Maybe they don't to you.

But when parties file for legal separation and there's all kinds of research on this and I don't have it in front of me unfortunately but I can easily track that down, but there's, you know, when couples file for legal separation, it's, the research shows that it's typically a time of ambivalence.

And it's, really people are, some, oftentimes looking for an opportunity not to separate or not to go the next step and file for an actual divorce. So in that type of scenario, you can see that it would be very beneficial for parties to know about these classes within their community.

Divorce and dissolution, that's the same thing. Parties may come in and they may decide, you know, for whatever reason they want to file the legal separation, you know, kind of try it out, that sort of thing.

They may, even if they do go ahead and file for the divorce, which seems so much more final, like they've already made a decision, again the research shows that that really is a period of time of ambivalence, that parties are really seeking out other opportunities.

Any of you that have been involved or have family members or friends that have been through a divorce or dissolution process know that it's a challenging time and that's, you know, that's obviously a time that people are looking for options anywhere that they can find them.

Truancy cases, this one is of particular interest to me in thinking through this and I think this would be something that you would find your judicial officers in your community being very, very excited about your programs and services. The reason I say that is truancy is often considered, again by the research, to be the first indicator that something is amiss within the family dynamic.

And typically the reasons, the most common reasons that children come before the attention of the court when they start, when they miss enough school that it's no longer, that it's taken outside of the school and it's taken outside of the kind of control mechanisms that a school will put in

place, once it gets to the court referral stage, then it's definitely indication that perhaps, you know, one of several common factors is at play.

It could be that the child is being bullied at school. Oftentimes or, you know, that the child is not, you know, stimulated by their educational level or, you know, they could be having those problems.

It's also very commonly an indicator that the family dynamic, that they're not, that children are not having their needs met at home. They may not be having their physical needs met so they're not attending school because they, you know, feel self-conscious.

You know, and it also could be an abuse or a neglect situation that really hasn't risen to the level of social services having launched an investigation. So again, that's why truancy is often considered sort of the first indicator that something's not going on. It could very likely be a family dynamic or the parental figure could be having issues.

The thing that is really difficult about truancy, in the divorce cases, you'll often have parties that are self-sufficient, that are, you know, they may have a, they even, may even have the financial means within the household to hire attorneys for both sides, that sort of thing. In truancy you may find families that have less access to resources.

And that's definitely true of the court as well, that the court will often find itself in a position, and I've been in truancy court, I've talked to judicial officers that have lamented the fact that they simply don't have in the truancy environment, they, at this point, keep in mind social services probably hasn't been involved.

Again, it hasn't risen to that level of interest or it hasn't risen to that level of degree and so there aren't the types of things that you may associate with a social services case, like parenting

classes or, you know, even something as simple as hygiene classes or something like that. I mean, they, those services have not yet been put into place.

And so a judicial officer is often put in the difficult position of realizing, okay, so I've had this child in front of my court a couple of times. There's something definitely not going well. And I've had the parents, because the parents are required to also attend truancy court with the youth, and I've had the parents in front of me.

There is something not going on and from my inquiry from the bench, I'm getting a feeling that there may be a family dynamic there. You know, mom and dad may be having some issue and that judicial officer often has no recourse, has no place to go.

So from that perspective, I think that it becomes clear that if you were to approach a judicial officer in your community, a judge that's presiding perhaps over a truancy docket and, you know, when I say judge and I, I use the terms judge/judicial officer interchangeably.

But that could include, it could include a judge, could include a magistrate, could include a commissioner, a referee. There are different terms for judicial officers within each jurisdiction. We'll talk more about that.

But again you can see where something like a Healthy Marriage program could be of tremendous interest to the judicial officer. When they have this family coming before them, they have no place to send the family.

And a continuation of that theme is a delinquency case that, oftentimes of course juveniles or youth or children may become involved in a delinquent act, status offenses like, let's say, like a curfew violation or a smoking or a shoplifting, some of those kind of minor charges. Again, it's an

indication that not all is well in the home and so again it becomes a place where your services are particularly beneficial.

Dependency and neglect cases - now I put this one at the end sort of in terms of last in priority because I know that there may be some concerns here that, wow, a case like that is probably beyond my comfort level to be able to, you know, meet that family's needs.

When you get to an abuse or neglect cases, obviously things have risen in severity and you could have some, you know, you could have some difficult dynamics involved in the families that are coming before the court.

And because of that, if social services as, has intervened, then, you know, perhaps that, then, perhaps some services have been provided sort of as the regular course of action in that case.

I still think that it's really important though and I also think that the potential exists to communicate with your local department of human services to let them know as I'm sure that you probably already do, just that, you know, that you're available and that your services may be entirely appropriate, may be really needed by a segment of their population.

If we could go to the next slide, so let's talk a little bit about court administration. And this is what I call the tricky part because judges and courts and communities are obviously all very, you know, they're, they've got their own unique flavor, their own unique form of administration.

So let me paint with a very broad brush just to give you a little bit of a concept in case you're a person that really hasn't had all that much court involvement, tell you a little bit about court organization. And again, this is where you may find that Web site to be helpful to you.

If you look at the, the page that I provided here is state court Web sites and you can see that if you were to, you know, cut and paste this link and go into it, you'd be able to jump into whatever state you're in. If you're in Arkansas or Alabama, you can go ahead and click on that state as they appear alphabetically and get a little bit of a feel for the structure.

So the bottom line is that, I think to again paint with a broad brush and it does matter. I mean, these things aren't, we're not just talking about this because, you know, because we want to. I think it does make a little bit of a difference in terms of your approach or your strategies in contacting your local jurisdiction.

It's important to keep in mind that some courts, in some states, judges are appointed to the bench. They'll be ((inaudible)) by a judicial commission or they'll be appointed by the governor or some configuration thereof or they may be elected officials.

The difference in that is there are some important differences with regards to ethical rules and the ability of a judicial officer to interact with any particular member of the community.

What you may find as a general rule is that in jurisdictions where judges are elected - and if you're in one of those jurisdictions, you know because you've seen judicial ads. If you haven't seen judicial ads, chances are you're in appointed, in an appointed jurisdiction.

And so in those elected, in the jurisdictions where judicial officers are elected, you may, you are likely to find that those judicial officers are a little bit less restricted with regards to what sort of involvement they can have with the community.

It's important to keep in mind that in some jurisdictions where judges are appointed, they may actually have some ethical prohibition about being too connected with community members to avoid any type of appearance of impropriety.

That may seem really crazy, but I just throw it out there in case you happen to contact a judicial officer and they seem really reticent to communicate with you.

It could be that they have some sort of ethical prohibition according to their state, their state judicials of, code of judicial canon that kind of, that makes them, it gives them pause in terms of connecting with members of the community. It's a perception thing. We don't need to get too far into it. Just be aware that it's, that it could be out there.

Elected officials, you're going to find that they're, you know, of course as a, as part of being an elected official, they need to make a lot more community outreach. It's something to keep in mind.

You may also find that the personalities between those two types can be a little bit different. Elected officials, just by their nature, need to be sort of outgoing and you may find that appointed judges are a little less so and perhaps more of that kind of traditional judicial role with some, you know, kind of a, more reserve, I think, than perhaps the elected officials.

So when you're communicating with those, oh, and then the other thing to keep in mind is that in court organization you also have court administrators. This person, we'll talk a little bit more when we get to the next slide, which is strategies. We're not quite there yet.

But we'll talk about how those court administrators or court employees could end up being your best source of contact. I would say that if you, that a lot of, there are a lot of judges, like I said, that are very familiar, very comfortable, very accustomed to reaching out to the community and saying, community, I'm in the position of making decisions about this family.

They need to access to services and I'm in the position to, you know, I need to make orders that put those services into place. There a lot of a judicial officers that are actively outreaching in the

community. Let's go ahead and go to the next slide because I think that if we go through, if we go to the strategy slide, we can look through this in greater specificity.

So in terms of the strategies, as we go down the list here, I can't, again, I've said before and I'll say again, because it's really important, that right now in bad budget times that people, the courts really are going to welcome and be very appreciative of what you offer.

One of the most common orders that you'll find and it's almost boilerplate, it's almost in every, well, I don't want to say in every, but it's in a high, high proportion of family or juvenile cases. You'll find that parenting class is really regularly offered and your other speakers will be talking about that as well.

In terms of efficacy rate and letting the judges know what your program has to offer, like a simple page, a simple one-page FAQ sheet. Judges are busy people. They have to read a ton of documents. The shorter, the sweeter that you can keep it the more beneficial that'll be.

Does the judge have a right-hand person like a court administrator? Do they have what's called a family court facilitator? What this person is is they're intended to be a bridge between the judicial officer and the parties that are coming before the court.

This person can help you get, find, schedule some time with the judge. This person can often be the person that is referring the parties to different classes and resources. So what you'd want to do is to go into, you can look at that state court Web site.

You can also go into, just Google whatever county it is that you're in plus, you know, plus the word court. Pop it up and take a look at court administration and see if there's a court administrator. That's probably the best place to start and then go ahead and contact that person and let them know what it is that you have to offer.

Another great place is your local family law section of the bar association or your local child law section of the bar association. If you go to the bar, so let's, so I'm in Colorado so if I go to the Colorado Bar Association, if I just put in those search terms, it'll pop up for me and let me know, it, there'll be the Colorado Bar Association.

Within that, I can look at sections and I can search and see if there's a family law section or child law section and there are in Colorado. There were in Utah when I was there.

Those are going to be great groups because those are groups that get together with the specific purpose of how do we improve our services as attorneys or as judges to the populations that we're serving, to the children or to the family in our community?

How do we do that within the legal environment? That, I think, in terms of if I were in your shoes and I were prioritizing how I wanted to go about making outreach, I think that's the number 1 place.

We were talking a little bit about elected judges and how some of them, or judges in general. Some of them are very familiar and very good at making outreach in the community and finding out what is out there and trying to connect themselves with the services available in the community. If you, the bar association is where you would find those types of judges.

So to call the chair of those bar association section and to let them know who are and to request some time on their agenda I think would be a really effective way to start to get to know people.

So that's the information that I have for you and I welcome questions at the end.

Rich Batten: Very good, very useful information. Thank you, Alicia.

Alicia Davis: Thank you.

Rich Batten: Next we have Lynda Williams. Ms. Williams works for the Dallas County Juvenile Department's Drug Court diversionary program. They're part of the county's juvenile probation office that works closely with the County Juvenile Court, also a part of the department. The program's goal is to divert youth from moving further into the juvenile justice system.

And since 1990 she has held various positions within the juvenile department as chemical assessment specialist, the lead counselor for the department's outpatient drug counseling program, a supervisor for the department's substance abuse unit and as a non-residential counselor for youth arrested for status offenses.

Her tenure with the department has focused on intervening in the behavior of youth referred to the juvenile probation department and helping the parents of these youth develop strategies to deal with their children.

Lynda is a licensed professional counselor, supervisor and a licensed chemical dependency counselor. Lynda will discuss the types of cases she refers to the ANTHEM Healthy Marriage program in Dallas County and why, how the referral process works and the extent to which the Dallas County Drug Court finds this partnership beneficial. Welcome to the webinar, Lynda.

Lynda Williams: Thank you, Rich, and I'd like to thank NHMRC for inviting me to participate in the webinar. I'm also really excited to talk about what we do and how ANTHEM Strong Families has helped our families, so if we could go to the next slide please.

To begin, what I'd like to do first of all is talk a little bit about our program. As a diversionary program, it's non-adversarial, so it's all about supporting and helping the families feel comfortable.

And to give some background information on our program, we've been, the Drug Court program has been in operation since 2003 and like Rich said it's one of many programs that our probation department has.

Our department operates under the oversight of our juvenile board and the juvenile board is made up of the district judges, county judges, county commissioner and the juvenile department administration. Our Drug Court is a deferred prosecution program and it's sanctioned by the Texas Family Code and since it is a diversionary program it's voluntary.

So the youth and the parents, when they're referred to our program, they're given an option of participating or not. If they make the decision to refuse participation, then the youth case is referred back to the district attorney for filing and pending court action.

The youth who are admitted into our program are required to participate for at least three months and no longer than six months according to the Texas Family Code.

We've had times where a young person and the parents agree to participate past the six months when that child was involved in some level of drug treatment and the belief was that they could benefit from the added support of the Drug Court program.

To talk a little bit about the success and recidivism, we have maintained a successful completion rate of 70% during the course of the existence of the Drug Court. And between 2008 and 2010, recidivism, which is really based on new offense six months after successful program completion, has been 6%.

My experience has been that the ANTHEM Strong Families, they have been tremendous in providing us a service to our families. It's been a longstanding relationship. They've been with us

for many years, before I came to the Drug Court, so I'm going to brag on them a little bit later. If we could go to the next slide, please.

All of the referrals to our program start with the district attorney's office and the youth have to have been arrested by one of the police agencies within Dallas County and the arrest is for a first-time offense and it is a misdemeanor drug offense. So we don't take any children into our program who have been on a previous probationary period.

The majority of the youth referred to our program are arrested at school and they're been, they've been found in possession of marijuana. We also get some referrals for young people who have been arrested and found in possession of small quantities of benzodiazepines, other prescription drugs and cocaine.

According to the Family Code, we receive referrals for youth between the ages of 10 and 17 and they live in Dallas County. The average age of our kids is 15. We haven't had anybody younger than 12, which I'm grateful for, come into our program.

Many of the youth in our program live in a single parent home, with grandparents or other family members. And when we're working with the parents and the guardians, we're able to provide them with information and support.

And this is one way where ANTHEM Strong Families has been a valuable resource for our program, just because of what they've done to help us. If we could go to the next slide please.

Our program staff consists of myself as the Drug Court Coordinator. I have two case managers, one clerk and our judge, so we don't have a very large staff. We have a capacity of 60 children at any point in time. Our judge is considered an associate judge. He is a contract employee with the department and he's supervised by our district judge.

Our judge is our leader. He heads the Drug Court team. He's the person who acknowledges the success of the young people in our program and he addresses any behavior problems that they may present with.

Our Drug Court program is comprised of three phases. Each phase has certain requirements that once they're achieved then that child is eligible to be promoted to the next phase.

Probably the most difficult phase for not only the young people and, but their parents is the young people are required to attend the court every week and sometimes that's a real hardship for our families because we have one court location and we've got families coming from all over Dallas County, so sometimes it's a real challenge for them.

All of the youth are required to complete a total of ten hours of community service. Our belief is that by giving back to the community, maybe they have some investment in their community.

They're, they are of course expected to attend school every day when their school is scheduled and they submit to regular and random urine screens. That's one of the ways that we're able to monitor whether or not they may be starting to use, continuing to use or all of the above.

Each youth is required to appear in court according to the phase requirement. So as they progress through the phases, they are required to attend court less frequently.

They are also given assignments. They have homework that they're expected to do and it's all going to be related to substance use so that they have some information.

A lot of times they'll come to me and say, Why do I have to do the homework? And the best response that I have to that is, I want you to have some information. If you're going to make the decision to use, at least know what it is that you're doing.

And then all of the young people must meet at least weekly with their assigned case manager. And the case manager will monitor that child's progress, address any concerns, whether it's a parent concern or the child has a concern. So the case managers get to know the young people on their caseloads really, really well.

So once a child successfully completes all phases of our program, he or she participates in a graduation activity and we hold graduation every month for those children who are eligible to graduate.

And that's a time where the judge really brags on the young person and especially the parents and talks about how proud he is of what they've accomplished during that period of time.

Typically a child is in our program an average of four months.

An additional incentive is that once a child successfully completes our program, they can have their record sealed almost immediately, which a child who is placed on regular formal probation has to wait at least two years to have their record sealed.

So that is often a real incentive for children to choose to be in our program because then they can have their record sealed much quicker. If we could go to the next slide, please.

Our program goals, we have the two main goals. One goal is to identify the level of that youth's involvement with alcohol and other drugs, And the way that we accomplish that is during the initial interview with the child, a decision is made whether or not a chemical assessment is necessary.

And that's based on a couple of screening tools that we use as well as what the child self-reports and what the parents say. If an assessment is needed and conducted, a recommendation is made. And then after that, the youth is referred for whatever level of intervention is identified, always remembering though that our program is voluntary.

So at any point in time if a child is in need of some level of treatment and he or she says, no, don't want to do that. Then they're allowed to be out of the program with the understanding that their case goes back to the District Attorney.

Another goal that we have is to divert that child from moving further into the juvenile justice system. And I think we're able to accomplish that by looking at whatever their drug use is.

Alicia had mentioned earlier about the delinquent behavior. If you think about substance use, that's usually an indication that there's something going on in the family too, so if we can address the substance abuse, address the family issues, I think that we're able to accomplish that goal.

And the other thing is that a child being placed on formal probation, if they're on probation for a year, their record isn't sealed for at least two years after they're successfully off probation.

So by completing our program and not going further into the system, I think it just goes without saying that their opportunity for future success is greatly increased if they're able to avoid formal probation. Next slide, please.

During the initial interview with that child and the parent, the case manager will introduce them to ANTHEM Strong Families workshops and they are referred to attend one of the Saturday workshops and they're encouraged to do that. Our belief is that by attending that workshop, the cohesion and communication within the family will be improved.

One of the things that's been really successful for us is we have a representative from ANTHEM Strong Families comes to court on the Tuesday before a scheduled workshop and during that time they meet with the parents who are scheduled to attend the workshop.

And it has really worked out because it gives the parents an opportunity to meet the person and usually it's the same person who will be conducting that parent workshop and they can also ask questions about, well, what am, what are we going to be learning and how's that going to work and how's that going to help me and things like that.

The other thing is, what I found is that the parent is a lot more comfortable in attending the workshop because they already have a familiar face so when they walk in for group they already know that person so they're a lot more relaxed.

Another thing that ANTHEM Strong Families has done to help us is to help us with our Spanish-speaking parents. We have a large population where many of the parents are Spanish speaking only and so they have arranged the schedule to accommodate those parents.

So every other month, the parent group is conducted in Spanish and I'll talk a little bit about this, as far as what the parents' responses have been. So if we could go to the next slide please.

Talking about benefits, it's kind of hard to keep it short and sweet because we see the Saturday workshop benefiting our parents because it gives them an opportunity to spend some positive time with their child.

Usually they just cross paths, parents going to work, kids going to school. Parents come home tired. Kids don't want to be at home. They want to go play with their friends or whatever. So we see that as an opportunity for them to just have that time together.

They're able to learn some skills and the skills that they learn are related to the conflict resolution, anger management, communication and family values and strengths.

The beauty of how the workshop is set up is that the youth and the parents are in separate groups during the majority of the day. And I, and it is a whole Saturday. It's from 8:45 until 5 o'clock. A lot of times we hear a lot of grumbling like, I have to go all Saturday. Yet though when they come back, they're going to say, this was the best program.

So they go there and they're learning the same information, just presented in a different format because of course you have to interact with kids differently than parents. The day is ended by bringing the two groups together and at that time they're given an opportunity to share experiences.

And the feedback that I've gotten, this experience has been a powerful one for both the child and for the parent. And what I've been told is there are lots of tears because they're both, the parent and the child are sharing some things that they haven't shared before.

And a lot of the parents will come back after they've attended the workshop and they'll say this has been one of the best experiences that they've had and that they learned so much about being a good parent. Sometimes they even ask if they can go back and we say, sure, just let me know when you want to go.

So as a result of participating in the workshop, both the youths and the parents are able to gain an understanding of what the other person's experience has been in their family.

I think anybody who works with young people, they just really believe that their parents only want to make their life miserable and sometimes the parents think the same thing because their kid's

behavior is pretty stressful. So by attending the workshop, I think that both of them realize that the belief that they each had is so not true.

The other thing about the partnership with ANTHEM is that we're able to take advantage of other programming that they have in our community to refer to some of our families to that. They're starting a parenting for first-time parents so we're referring some young people to that.

So on a final note, I am so excited that ANTHEM Strong Families has agreed to present at the Texas Association of Drug Court Professionals conference. This conference is going to be held in Dallas during October of this year and it's an opportunity for Drug Court programs throughout the state to come and receive information and share information.

And I think that this will give an opportunity for us both, ANTHEM and us, to talk about how our partnership has been beneficial and also I think give ANTHEM an opportunity to make other Drug Court programs throughout the state aware of what they do and look to see how they might be able to expand that. Thank you so much for having me today. I appreciate it.

Rich Batten: Thank you, Lynda. Now to round out our presentation, we will now hear from Ann Bruce.

Ms. Bruce has been a Manager of the Building Healthy Marriages program in Weld County, Colorado for the last four years.

This program is a collaborative effort between the Department of Human Services, Community Mediation Project, which is a faith-based agency, United Way of Weld County and the University of Northern Colorado.

Ann also leads the Healthy Relationship work team for the Colorado Fatherhood Council that is working to bridge the gap between fatherhood and Healthy Marriage grantees in the state.

Ann will discuss how her program's partnership with the courts was formed, whether it is a significant referral source of participants and the extent to which clients referred from the courts are a good match for the type of services that her program delivers. Ann.

Ann Bruce: Thanks, Rich, and thank you, National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, for giving me this opportunity to speak about this wonderful partnership that we have here in Weld County.

To give you a little background, Building Healthy Marriages is a Priority Level 2 Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grant that was awarded to the Weld County Department of Human Services in partnership with United Way of Weld County. They handle our promotions and our special events.

We also partner with Community Mediation Project, which is a faith-based agency that handles our education seminars and coaching, and finally University of Northern Colorado that does our assessments and our research.

However, even before the grant announcement, the county officials believed that teaching relationship skills and strengthening families was at the core of solving and/or at least reducing many of the social issues facing our residents today.

Our work with the courts of Weld County was a long process of outreach and education. My staff and I went to several unit meetings in conjunction with the County's Fatherhood Initiative representative, Tyler Osterhaus, to talk about what our programs had to offer and how we may be of service to them and their clients.

This unit meeting included juvenile and adult probation officers, lawyers and judges and initially led to BHM being added to the menu of programs for the individual to pick from for their treatment plan.

At the same time, one of our faith-based partners, Waypoints Church, made connections through members of their community to several agencies that included Drug Court, which is a drug-ordered recovery program, work release and two recovery houses, Loved Ones Against Meth and Godpath House.

They then contacted leaders of each of these programs to explain Building Healthy Marriages and the curriculums, which we use. The first one is Within My Reach.

Now Within My Reach is an eight-hour seminar for single adults, developed by the makers of PREP, based on research that most singles aspire to be in a relationship or marriage and touches on what a healthy relationship should look like, life goals and some co-parenting. Most of its success is seen with at-risk adults.

And then the next one is PREP. PREP is also another eight-hour seminar, but this one's specifically for married or committed relationships. Outcomes and measurements of our evaluation have shown its effectiveness in strengthening committed relationships by touching on communication style, conflict resolution and the steps to creating a healthy relationship.

In addition to these, our partner, our participants from the juvenile probation program, we use the Love Notes curriculum. Now for those of you who may not know, this one is geared towards young adults and teens. It talks about how to choose and build a healthy relationship and is effective in assisting teens in making good choices and decreasing risky behaviors.

The seminars were also offered to the probation officers so they could experience first hand what they are recommending for their clients. What we have heard from our referring probation officers is that Building Healthy Marriages offers a different aspect of building relationships.

(Cheryl Bault), one of our juvenile probation officers who has referred several of her cases to BHM, stated, "We have services in, for kids in Weld County but they are the basic (site) groups. Building Healthy Marriages gives something different, especially for girls. Anything involving relationships is beneficial for girls."

As many of you who've used the Love Notes curriculum know, it talks about what unhealthy relationships look like. For these girls who are already at risk, this is often the first time their idea of quote unquote "true love," or what they think a healthy relationship should be, has been challenged and by someone other than their parents.

So how this works is the probation officer will discuss the treatment plan options with the individual. If the individual chooses Building Healthy Marriages, they will get, give the client a flyer or a brochure on Building Healthy Marriages and point out both the phone numbers and the Web sites for them to register for the classes on their own.

Now there are several incentives for that would make a person want to sign up for our classes. The most obvious and what was spoken of before is that it is a free class where several of the other choices have costs associated with it.

Also the probation officers have been very creative with the use of community service hours. In addition to receiving eight hours of community service for eight hours of a seminar, a person might receive two to three additional hours for bringing a friend or a partner.

Building Healthy Marriages will quite often run a Within My Reach and/or PREP class simultaneously with Love Notes class in the same facility, very similar to what Lynda explained in ANTHEM. So a client could even, could receive even more community service hours if they bring a family member to a class.

Then, to ensure that the client participated actively and learned something, many of the POs will award a few more hours if the client is able to summarize what they've learned at the class. In order for a client to receive community service hours, however, they must bring in a Certificate of Completion that all of our participants receive if they graduate from the class.

Now to be clear, a person who is currently involved in one of these court systems, and we have folks from probation, Drug Court or work release, they will most likely have a mandated treatment plan. Being a federal program, as you all know, we're strictly voluntary. In order to maintain our voluntary status, we've set up a few provisions.

The first was to educate our judges that they cannot mandate a person or a couple into our program. However, many of them will suggest it when they believe it to be appropriate. A client must have several program options that they can choose from under their own volition. Building Healthy Marriages is just one of them.

Once they are at the seminar, they have the right to leave at any time as anyone else would who was participating, however, they would not receive the Certificate of Completion and therefore forfeit the community service hours.

For those participants from the juvenile system, there is an informed consent that must be signed by the parent and/or the guardian, whomever brings the child to the class that states that the youth does have the right to leave.

But we explain to them both together that if they do, we will contact the parents and the PO. Again, the client will not earn the community service hours and there's no partial credit given.

This informed consent also covers procedures that will occur if there's any disclosure of abuse and this is important with our youth. First, that we are mandated reporters. We all are either direct

employees or subcontracted with the Department of Human Services and therefore will report any disclosure to Child Welfare.

But secondly we will also report any continuing needs to the referring agency and/or the professional counselor currently involved with the juvenile or the family.

I would like to point out that we do not segregate our classes. In other words, there's no special classes given for those (in courts). They go in with any of our regular classes. And so far, overall, the experience has been a positive one for those involved.

The last group of men from work release said it really impacted how they treated each other and their families. Also the recovery houses use a lot of the communication and conflict resolution techniques that we teach in their everyday interaction.

In the year that this partnership has been active, we have served 21 people from probation, 4 people from diversion or work release and 25 people from Drug Court. As with most new referral sources, getting numbers can be slow at first but generally is improving, as the relationship gets stronger.

The slow start is usually due to several reasons, but primarily is about trusting that our services are what their clients need. So this begs the question as to the extent to which clients referred from the court are a good match for the types of services that the BHM program delivers.

There are some serious considerations when looking at starting a program like this. Besides the voluntary status that must be maintained, there's also drug and alcohol and domestic violence issues that cannot be overlooked.

Building Healthy Marriages is very fortunate to have partnered with a faith-based agency like Waypoints Church that already administers to the drug-addicted population and has staff trained to deal with people who come to a class with addiction issues.

As for domestic violence issues, we have spent a great deal of time talking with the probation officers and educating them on the fact that people with current DV issues probably won't get what they need from our program since their issues go deeper than what we deal with.

We do have a comprehensive DV protocol. That was developed with our local domestic violence program and is reviewed annually with them to ensure that it is still current and relevant.

Per this protocol, if someone does disclose domestic violence, we do have a staff member with over 15 years' experience in working with families who have or are currently living with domestic violence in their relationships who will talk with the couple and refer to them to more appropriate treatment programs in their community.

And for the record, these referrals are given to the perpetrator and the victim separately for safety reasons. However, we do not typically screen for domestic violence during the registration of our public seminars.

We do this during the assessment process to register for our mentoring programs, which is our next-step program, but not for our public, eight-hour seminars, so there is the potential for couples and individuals with current DV issues to be in our public seminars.

Again, per our protocol, all of our staff and educators must attend a domestic violence training annually in order to maintain their ability to teach our classes and get paid. And this class is presented by our local domestic violence agency and is around 16 hours every year.

That being said, I'd like to share with you a story about one of our participants and her experiences with Building Healthy Marriages. (Terry) was not, was a long-term meth addict. She became part of the Weld County Drug Court program.

Through this program she and several others came to a Within My Reach class. She took the tools and implemented them in her life. She became one of our biggest recruiters to Within My Reach for Drug Court and she eventually became the first official graduate of Drug Court.

She then took the PREP class with her live-in boyfriend and which she had a child with. They loved the class and again implemented the tools to their relationship. (Terry) and her boyfriend had been living together for years before they took our program, but because of this, they approached our facilitator and asked him to marry them.

He then met with them and took them through a premarital inventory, which we use to prepare and enrich, and then performed their wedding. They have become a permanent part of Waypoints' community. In fact, (Terry) is teaching some of their kids' classes and is currently on her first mission trip.

This mission trip is focused in on an inner city, in a major inner city working with people caught up in addiction, prostitution and homelessness. Through BHM program and other programs, (Terry) was able to put her life back together again and become a healthy part of our community.

Now as we come to the end of our fifth and final year of the grant, we have been looking at ways that will allow us not only to continue this program but also expand into other areas.

We are fortunate to have strong connections with the Colorado State Responsible Fatherhood Initiative and to have three active fatherhood programs in Weld County. Building Healthy

Marriages quite often partners with the Fatherhood programs to provide services in our, to our families and communities in a more holistic way.

One program that is being piloted in conjunction with Fatherhood, Child Welfare and Family Treatment Court is a program called Parents Forever, which teaches effective communication and conflict resolution skills to co-parents.

In this situation, co-parenting includes not only the child's two parents, if they're available and sometimes they're even together, but also any stepparents, partners, foster care parents or any other adults responsible for parenting that child.

Also, since these parents are in the Human Services system, one night of the class is devoted to systems navigations and community resources. The idea is to help these families build a more functional and stable foundation so the impact of the services that they receive through Human Services and the community will be longer lasting.

With this pilot, we are currently looking at how we can combine Responsible Fatherhood, Healthy Marriages and Human Services to create strength-based programs for the, for couples and families going through divorce mediation, Divorce Court or for grandparents raising grandkids.

I believe that most of us will take what we've learned about relationship skills and apply them to our next of ((inaudible)) of services, finding new ways to improve relationships in our respective community. Thank you very much.

Rich Batten: Thank you, Ann. We'll now take a moment and interact with some questions from you, our participants. And if you have a question that you'd like to ask that hasn't been addressed or further clarification on any of the points made, you can see the slide there now on how to submit your question and we'll take a few minutes to interact with those.

So we'll have a time of interacting with questions and then we'll have a brief close with some polling questions just to help us evaluate the effectiveness of this webinar.

Ann, since you just completed, what aspects of your program do the court-referred youth seem to respond to most?

Ann Bruce: I think what the youth respond to the best is the fact that when we start talking about healthy relationships, many of the youth have this idea that healthy relationships means, you know, the partner's got to text them every few minutes to know where they are.

They've been inundated with media such as Twilight where, you know, the kids think it's adorable that Edward is watching Bella sleep. And so they glamorize that sort of stalker-type behavior into what's a healthy relationship.

And we start talking about that and break that down and really start to explain to them why that's not healthy and how that's a very controlling aspect of the relationship and is this really what they want.

We start off with looking at healthy, what their healthy goals are, what they want in their life, and tie that into these controlling behaviors and some of these more, even violent, relationship behaviors that you often see with youth and ask the youth, is this really what's going to get you to where you want to be?

And, you know, we get a lot of the tough kids that are like, oh yes, sure, you know, and act all tough, but we've had several of them come back and say, you know, you made me think and, no, that's not what I want. And they ask for more services or they'll connect with our youth educators and almost set up a mentoring-type situation.

Rich Batten: With that and you mentioned, you know, the media and the input that they have and that they bring to that, is your, in your programs do you use a lot of media richness in the learning process or in the group setting with the youth or even couples?

Ann Bruce: We do. With Love Notes in particular we try to bring in more of the media and the music, but we also are lucky enough in our county to have some presenters that will get into a more positive masculinity, positive femininity program that we can refer these kids to that really gets into the media. But we do touch in on it in our programs as much as the curriculum will allow.

Rich Batten: Okay.

Ann Bruce: You know, we have eight hours and even in that amount of time we're crunching some of the topics.

Rich Batten: Very good. Lynda, how does parents respond when they're recommended to participate in the ANTHEM program?

Lynda Williams: Well like I said earlier, initially they kind of go, a whole Saturday, you want me to do a whole Saturday. And so that's where it's been really helpful to have a representative come and talk to them about the program and explain what the experience is going to be.

Then, and, you know, they also provide them with lunch so that helps a little bit too. And then a lot of times what happens is when one family has gone to the workshop and then they come back and they start talking about it, then other, and they start talking to other families, then you don't hear those kind of things.

And, you know, we've had parents who say, I work on Saturday. I just can't go. So we'll kind of ask them, Is there any other adult family member who might be able to take your child, although we think it'd really be beneficial for you.

And again with that representative there to answer those questions, because recently I had one dad who said, Oh, both my wife and I work. There's no way that I'm going to be able to attend on that Saturday. So I said, Well, if you're not able to go this Saturday, then you can go on another Saturday. Well, lo and behold, they went on Saturday.

So I think the really important thing is just that connection that they make with that person who is going to be their facilitator for that group and, so initially you kind of get this, A whole Saturday, oh my goodness, I don't want to do a whole Saturday. And then they go and they're going, Oh this is the best thing that ever, I ever did.

Rich Batten: Here's a question for Lynda and Ann and just tell me no if you don't have the authority or feel good answering this question, but do you think the Dallas Juvenile Department or Weld County, other, would be interested and consider funding relationship education classes for juvenile offenders outside of what the, you know, the current grant funding is from other sources?

Lynda Williams: You used the "F" word, you know.

Rich Batten: Yes, I know. That's why I gave a disclaimer ((inaudible)).

Lynda Williams: Well actually I think that currently, I think that Strong Families, ANTHEM Strong Families is doing something in the Juvenile Detention Center.

Rich Batten: Yes.

Lynda Williams: Exactly what is they're doing, I don't know because that's, I'm not really connected to that part of the department, yet though, you know, when you have a successful program and it's really helping the kids you serve, then, you know, there might be some ways that they could do that, but, yes, funding is always a challenge.

Ann Bruce: Right, funding, I mean...

Rich Batten: Ann, you can go ahead.

Ann Bruce: I'm sorry, Rich.

Rich Batten: Go ahead. I was just saying go ahead.

Ann Bruce: Our juvenile system would love to continue this program, you know, and if we can find the funding that would be great. One of the things that we are very keen on here in Weld County is bringing in all the players to the table and sometimes it, on the outside it may not seem to make sense to bring a certain person to the table, but you never know what assets they can bring.

Money's not always what's needed. Sometimes it's facilitators. Sometimes it's graphic artists, whatever, but we work on trying to bring as many people to the table so that funding is more, the arguments for funding are much stronger.

Rich Batten: Yes.

Ann Bruce: So yes, we would like to, but again, it comes down to that "F" word.

Rich Batten: Okay, we'll have to edit that in the transcript. And speaking of that, a couple questions have come in that there will be a transcript made available for this aspect of the webinar. The question and answers as well as the presentation is available on that healthymarriageinfo.org Web site.

And then we will also have the PowerPoint slides available there and an audio version of this webinar so you can relive it in, another time. The PowerPoint slides will be PDF file so you will not receive a PowerPoint download but PDF file that you can refer back to. We'll just take a couple of more questions. I'm not sure, Alicia, are you still on the line?

Alicia Davis: I am.

Rich Batten: Very good, very good. I, are there cases that you think judges would refer, well let me ask this. What other program, are there other programs that judges refer that you're aware of, couples or individuals to that would be similar to these type of programs, Healthy Marriage or Healthy Relationship programs?

Alicia Davis: Yes, I think that there are. I, let, one of the most common orders that you'll find in a court order for really any child or family case is something like parenting classes.

Rich Batten: Yes.

Alicia Davis: And so I think that, as I've listened to a greater description of these other programs that sound so good, I was just thinking about some of the parallels between parenting classes and the programs that were described today.

So I think it's a really natural fit and I think that because judges are so used to, so accustomed to referring or to ordering parenting classes, I think that it, to make the, that parallel for them I think would, you know, help them get a better grasp of the need or the benefit.

Rich Batten: Let me ask you this too and, you know, everyone's busy, judges especially. How, would it be working through a court administrator to let someone know as far as the content of the course, the material? The question basically was, you know, is there any way that a judge may even sit in on a class or, to become more familiar?

Alicia Davis: I think that the benefit of a judge sitting in on a class is undeniable. Given just time limitations on judicial officers, I think that if you were able to get a judicial officer at your, to your class or to your program or to even, you know, come and view your facility, I think that, you know, count yourself as lucky because I think that that would be difficult to do.

What my recommendation would be to simply recognize up front that their time is really limited and that they are by their training, by their background, they are people that are trained to respond well to paper documents, especially paper documents that are succinct and concise.

Which is why I would probably recommend what I've had the most success with in trying to communicate with busy judicial officers and court administration as well, is to provide a half-page or a page FAQ sheet that lists out, you know, what it is, what the benefits are, how they can utilize it, you know, and that's something that's easy to produce and get out there and put your contact information on.

And, you know, I really do think that if more judicial officers are aware that this is available in their communities, most of them probably are not aware, I think that if they do know about it that, just like I believe it was Ann that was saying that the referrals start to come in more and more as the relationships are started. It starts developing as people get a better sense of what it is that these programs can do for the people coming before court.

Rich Batten: Great suggestions, thanks. Ann, Lynda, do you have anything to add or comments in that regard?

Lynda Williams: No, I don't thank you.

Ann Bruce: Just getting the word out.

Rich Batten: That's not ((inaudible)) answer, no. Go ahead, Ann. You were going to say something.

Ann Bruce: That's okay. Just getting the word out, I mean, we, our programs are open to the community and most Healthy Marriage grant programs are open to the community.

And sometimes going at the judge, instead of saying that, you know, come to this class so you can see what you're, or you're recommending for your folks, come to this class for your own merit and for your own relationships and there's quite a bit that you can learn through that as well. Yes and the sell sheets, the half-page FAQ sheets are great to get information out to very, very busy people so.

Rich Batten: (Got it). I'll throw this question out to any one of you who'd like to respond. This individual says, "I wear, kind of, I wear several hats. I'm a certified family life educator with benefits of being part of a corporation but also a non-profit status and also have two churches, non-profit and incorporated."

And is there, should you present, should she present both statuses when speaking with the court or is it, obviously it would seem, it'd probably depend on the specific court and relationships and the community, but do you see any benefit to any one of those outreaches or representation to the courts of, you know, whether non-profit or for-profit, faith-based or not faith based?

Ann Bruce: Right. Well for us, and this is Ann, what really helped us with one of our faith-based agencies, Waypoint, actually went to the members in their own church community and had church members who worked in those different areas and by going through that aspect that was very helpful in getting into some of those court programs.

Outside of that, the other way that we've come at it and, you know, we're on an interesting position as well. We are county government but we also partner with the University, a non-profit and a faith-based agency. So we were able to kind of fill whatever needs that our audience was looking at.

And just my suggestion would be to know your audience, know some of their history and some of their background, know maybe some of their trigger points or their political platforms so that you can talk to them in the language that they can hear you, if that makes sense.

Rich Batten: Yes, it is.

Ann Bruce: Okay, thanks.

Rich Batten: Any other questions? We're, if you have a question, this is the time to submit it. If not, we'll begin to wrap things up. Any closing comments or thoughts or key takeaways that any of you, our presenters, would like to highlight or remind our participants about this subject or topic?

Alicia Davis: This is Alicia. I guess the one thing that I would like to say is just, again, I really appreciate that you made this webinar available, to be able to participate because I think it's such a wonderful service that you as providers are able to give to the community.

And I think that with people coming before the court, children and families that, you know, that by their own will, by the filing of a divorce or because they've been the subject of a truancy petition

or a delinquency or a child abuse and neglect petition, it's just such a tremendous service that you're providing, so thank you for that.

Lynda Williams: This is Lynda and I say ditto.

Rich Batten: Very good. Ann, any closing comments?

Ann Bruce: Actually just in thinking about families going through divorce and the dissolution of a marriage, it's really a great time to be bringing in Healthy Relationships. What I've found in our work is that, you know, you go through the process of separating from your spouse and you may have children and you're expected to co-parent those children in a healthy manner.

Well, co-parenting means communication and conflict resolution with the person you couldn't communicate and resolve conflict with well enough to stay married. So for the sake of that child, having them go through healthy relationship classes is huge. The benefits are huge for that child and for the adults that are going through this. That's my two cents.

Rich Batten: Thank you. Well, we're going to close things up here and before we sign off, before you leave, we would like for you to take just a few minutes to respond to some polling questions that we have regarding the webinar.

First one should be there on your screen and go ahead and answer at this moment if you can. "I have a better understanding of the potential of courts to serve as a referral source for a Healthy Marriage program." How would you respond to that in regards to participation in this webinar? We'll give just a few more minutes for people to respond, or not minutes, seconds.

All right, the next question, number 2, "I have a better understanding of the types of clients involved in the court system that would most benefit from Healthy Marriage programming." See

the responses coming in, so I'll leave it there for just a little bit while you're still clicking your response, your answer.

Okay, the third question, third polling question. "I have a better understanding of why judges would be interested in referring certain cases to my Healthy Marriage or Healthy Relationship program."

And last, but not least, "I have a better understanding of how to reach out to courts or judges in my area to offer my Healthy Marriage programming as a referral source."

Okay, well I want to thank all of our presenters again and all of you who participated in today's webinar. As was mentioned at the beginning, a recording of today's session will be on the NHMRC Web site, healthymarriageinfo.org, within the next seven to nine business days.

And I would also like to draw your attention to a new tip sheet that will be posted shortly, probably within the next week or so, and that's called MRE, Marriage Relationship Education and the Judicial System, What's the Connection? And that will be found in the Features section of healthymarriageinfo.org.

This tip sheet will provide an overview of the United States court system and offer tips for how relationship educators can approach judges and court staff to form a partnership, I think an appropriate follow-up to the topic and discussion that we've had today. There'll also be some live links or some links that will go to a number of the Web sites that were mentioned.

Again, thank you all for your participation and hope you have a great and a wonderful afternoon.
Thank you.

Operator: Ladies and gentlemen, this does conclude today's conference. We thank you for your participation.

END