

About Family Bridges

Healthy marriages are the cornerstone of strong families, which form the bedrock of a thriving society. Family Bridges, Chicagoland Healthy Marriage Initiative recognizes society's critical need to strengthen marriages, especially among minorities and low-income communities. Through a unique network of providers, this newly charged initiative teaches couples, individuals and high school students how to create and maintain relationships that enrich each partner, their children and the community. Family Bridges, Chicagoland Healthy Marriage Initiative, is administered by Meier Clinics Foundation in collaboration with the Chicago Alliance for Latino Marriages (CALMA), the African American Network (Arusi), the Chicagoland Marriage Resource Center and other diverse partners from different Chicagoland locations. Meier Clinics has been awarded from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), \$2,000,000 annually for five years. The total program costs that will be financed with federal funds is 90% with an additional 10% (\$222,421) funded by non-governmental sources. This collaborative effort relies on a two-pronged approach to teach minorities and individuals in low-income communities how to build successful marriages.

First, a widespread media campaign reaches more than 1.7 million individuals annually on the importance of healthy marriages and the positive influence they have on children.

Second, through our targeted education campaign we have served about 10,000 residents in six Illinois counties (Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will) learn what it takes to create healthy, long-term relationships. Through educational workshops, family retreats and marriage conferences, men and women are taught a variety of interpersonal skills including conflict resolution, goal setting and effective communication. Teenagers are taught how to look beyond casual partners to find compatible individuals who will help build solid, respectful relationships and understand the components of healthy marriages.

Providers

- Archdiocese of Chicago, Family Ministries
- Casa de Carina
- Confederation of Spanish American Families
- Cornerstone Christian Counseling
- Hispanic Bible School
- I Am Able Center for Family Development
- Lawndale Christian Health Center
- Manjarres & Associates
- Meier Clinics
- New Life Centers of Chicagoland
- St. Pius V. Parish
- The Salvation Army Family and Community Services
- University of Illinois, DuPage Extension

What We Do

Family Bridges offers many free or low-cost services to the public in various Chicagoland locations. Our services span across six counties in northeastern Illinois: Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will. Everyone is eligible to participate. We aim to serve low to moderate income individuals, high school students, married and unmarried couples, single people, individuals at risk for divorce, including unwed expectant parents, single mothers and divorcees.

Some of the services we offer at no cost or at a minimal charge:

- Educational relationship enhancement workshops for couples and families (Family Wellness, Within Our Reach and Fragile Families curricula)
- Educational relationship enhancement workshops for single individuals (How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk/Jerkette (Pick A Partner) and Within My Reach curricula)
- Relationship skills instruction for teens (Love U 2 curriculum)
- Money management and practical decision making skills for teens ("Welcome to the Real World curriculum)
- Week-end leisurely retreats for families and single individuals
- Premarital education and assessment (Prepare/Enrich/FOCCUS inventory)
- Relationship quality assessment for married and committed couples
- Conferences and educational presentations on various family, parenting, and relationship related topics
- Mentoring and relationship support for couples and single individuals
- Printed educational brochures and handouts with information and practical tips about healthy relationship and communication strategies

Our services are available in English and Spanish. Our services are on-going, offered continuously throughout the year. During the first year of services, 79.3% of couples served identified themselves as Latinos and 32.5% of single individuals served identified themselves as African American. While 56% of the groups held for couples were facilitated in Spanish, 45.5% of the groups held for singles were facilitated in English.

Who We Serve

Our target population is low-income communities. For year 1 of the program implementation, 84% of our participants resided in Cook County, which accounts for 50% of the population in Illinois. 81% of participants served (couples and individuals), reported earning 5,000 or less a year.

Occupation of High School Students' Parents

Occupation	Father (%)	Mother (%)
Custodial	10.2	11.9
Industrial	51.2	21
Professional	4.4	4.1

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Educational	0.5	4.8
Administrative	4.6	10.5
Not Working	8	33.1
Sales	4.9	4.1
Retail Store	1.9	3.7
Own Personal Business	14.1	6.8

Stressors Faced by Participants

Significant Problems or Difficulties	Couple (%)	Individual (%)
Extended Family	11.8	11.1
Parenting	10.2	9.5
Infertility	1.4	0.9
Sexual Intimacy Issues	6.9	4.6
Basic Needs	4.3	13.4
Finances	19.5	26.2
Work	9.3	23.2
Immigration	6	3.3
Emotional Abuse	17.1	28.9
Physical Abuse	4.9	14
Mental Health Issues	5.5	12.1

Participants enrolled in the Family Bridges program indicate challenging stressors as indicated above that put them at risk for ongoing conflict and tension in the home.

Measuring Impact

Family Bridges workshops are highly effective: the outcome results show that participants report significant improvement in their communication and problem-solving skills and in their ability to insure personal physical and emotional safety.

- 73% of participants who registered for the program completed the program.

Couples

- 72.2% of participants demonstrated improvement in their communication skills.
- 79.3% of participants demonstrated improvement in their conflict resolution skills.
- 78.9% of participants demonstrated improvement in their sense of commitment.

Individuals

- 74.0% of participants demonstrated improvement in their communication skills.
- 69.3% of participants demonstrated improvement in their conflict resolution skills.

Healthy Marriages, Strong Families, Thriving Communities

- 66.4% of participants demonstrated improvement in their sense of commitment.

High School

- 73.6% of participants reported improvement in their understanding of relationship development.
- 79% of participants reported improvement in their communication skills.
- 56.9% of participants reported improvement in their understanding and detecting self-destructive behavior.
- 56.5% of participants reported improvement in their understanding in finance and budgeting.
- 78.6% of participants reported improvement in their understanding risk and safety in relationships.

Cultural Adaptation

The Family Bridges Program is committed to ongoing cultural adaptation of curriculum to ensure the programs are relevant and practical. We believe that universal principles of commitment, conflict-resolution, and communication are valued across different populations, however, each community and culture varies in the approach taken to apply these life skills. Therefore, we work closely with our partners and group facilitators to adapt the evidenced-based curriculum relied upon in our program. Our model of adaptation includes: (1) adapting the stories and analogies to better relate to the audience served, (2) empowering facilitators from the community served to deliver the program, (3) and integrating key dynamics of acculturation and family structure. Some of the key cultural beliefs addressed include the following:

Key Core Cultural Beliefs

- Amiability (Personalismo)
- Family Orientation
- Time Perspective
- Religion and Spirituality
- Fate & Suffering
- Authority
- Community