

## Participant Bios

**Diann Dawson**, ACF Director of Regional Operations, founder and co-lead of the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative, provides leadership and direction to ACF's ten regional offices. With a background in social work and commitment to child well being, she has been a strong supporter of ACF's work to strengthen and rebuild families through the Healthy Marriage Initiative. Under her leadership, the agency has developed the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative (AAHMI), which promotes culturally competent strategies and collaborations.

Ms. Dawson is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Presidential Rank Award for Meritorious Service which recognizes outstanding achievement by members of the Senior Executive Service. She has an M.S.W. degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a J.D. degree from the Columbus School of Law at Catholic University of America.

**Frank Fuentes** is the Deputy Director, Office of Head Start, Administration for Children and Families, and ACF's lead for the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative. His federal government career has spanned 28 years and many programs providing human and social services to needy children and families. He previously served as the Deputy Commissioner for the Administration for Children, Youth and Families. In January 2000 he was inducted into the Senior Executive Service and selected to serve as the first Deputy Commissioner for the Office of Child Support Enforcement. In his leadership role with the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative, he is ensuring that marriage programs and services are being designed to address the unique cultural, linguistic, demographic, and socio-economic needs of Hispanic communities.

Mr. Fuentes has also served as the Deputy and Acting Associate Commissioner for the Child Care Bureau, as Director of Program Support in the Family and Youth Services Bureau managing the Drug Abuse Prevention Program for Runaway and Homeless Youth and Gang Prevention Program, as a Child Welfare program specialist in the Children's Bureau. Mr. Fuentes has been the recipient of numerous awards including a Presidential Citation for Leadership for his work on the White House Conference for Families, and most recently the Secretary's Recognition Award for Heroism in relation to the events surrounding 9/11. The award he is proudest of was his selection as the first recipient of the 'Plate of Plenty' from the Migrant Programs' Branch and Association.

**Gordon James** is a board member of the Native Wellness Institute board of directors. In this role, he shares from his extensive experience working throughout Indian Country, including: people development – providing training programs for individuals, families, organizations and communities, and improving personal, professional or community development; curriculum development - including government to government relations, substance abuse prevention and cultural preservation, and interpersonal relationship skill building; program development - coordinating and managing service programs including family support services, volunteer

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services, and substance abuse prevention and intervention; or administration and planning - including successful program administration, proposal writing, and tribal governance, including eight years as Chairman of the Skokomish Tribal Council, the governing body of the Skokomish Tribe. Together with his wife, they wrote the book “Coming Together in a Good Way a Native Path to finding Love,” and the “Leading the Next Generations Healthy Relationship Curriculum.”

Over the last six years, Mr. James has co-designed and been the lead trainer/consultant for the “Government to Government Training,” offered through the Washington State Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs.

**Pam James** is the Project Director for The Native Wellness Institute, “Leading the Next Generations-Healthy Relationship Curriculum” based on the book “Coming Together in a Good Way” she wrote with her husband, Gordon James. As a national and international trainer and consultant, Mrs. James has over two decades of experience working in tribal communities in the social and health Services fields. She has extensive experience in social service management, program design, people management, program administration, improving personal, professional and community development, individual, couple and family counseling, grant/program compliance, proposal writing, national conference planning and co-designed the government-to-government training provided by the Washington State Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs. For eight years, Gordon James has been Chairman of the Skokomish Tribal Council, the governing body of the Skokomish Tribe. Mrs. James believes life is simple: “do the right thing, love with all you have and laugh until you cry,” and, remember, “Life’s a Wonderful Exciting Adventure, focus on what’s good and leave the rest.”

**Alicia La Hoz, Ph.D.**, is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist, Director of Family Bridges, Chicagoland Healthy Marriage Initiative at Meier Clinics Foundation. Dr. La Hoz has worked with the Latino community in the Chicagoland area in collaborative and community efforts. Specifically, she has worked with other key leaders in developing and coordinating the Chicago Alliance for Latino Marriages (CALMA), offering multiple preventative marriage and relationship programs for the Latino community. She currently works at Meier Clinics developing the Latino program and working with children, adolescents and adults facing myriad of difficulties including: family and marriage problems, anxiety, stress, anger, depression, conduct disorders, eating disorders, codependency, post traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorders, borderline personality problems, domestic violence, premarital needs and relational issues. She completed a certificate on domestic violence in Florida and worked with battered women in a women’s shelter for a year as part of an internship program while completing her Masters degree in Clinical Psychology. Dr. La Hoz has also been involved in capacity training for lay counseling ministry with clergy in Latin America. Dr. La Hoz is an assistant faculty member for Trinity International University, South Florida Campus teaching Community Psychology in the graduate Psychology department. Dr. La Hoz worked on a white

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paper for the Annie Cassie Foundation, which was converted to a toolkit for working with Latino Couples. She is currently working on multiple research projects related to working with Latino marriages in the United States. The research projects are an extension of her dissertation, which was on Acculturation and Gender Issues with Latino Marriages. Moreover she is a consultant for Urban Strategies in the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative (HHMI).

**Nisa Muhammad** is the founder of Wedded Bliss Foundation, a community-based organization helping teens, singles and couples create healthy relationships and healthy marriages so more children grow up with the benefits of a two-parent family. Her work includes being the creator of Black Marriage Day, which started in 2002 as an opportunity for communities to celebrate marriage in very unique ways. Black Marriage Day is the fourth Sunday in March and the first one was held in 2003 with 30 cities participating and has grown to over 200 cities conducting celebrations in 2008.

She is the editor of *Raising the Bottom: Promoting Marriage in the Black Community*. Mrs. Muhammad collaborated with Dr. Rozario Slack to develop a Black marriage education curriculum called Basic Training for Couples in response to the pleas from people around the country to create something to meet the needs of the Black community. The demand for more marriage education products led to the creation of Basic Training for Singles, Basic Training for Men and Basic Training for Women. Mrs. Muhammad uses these curricula to provide marriage education services in Washington, DC's poorest communities. Her work has expanded to reach teens in search of skills to develop healthy relationships and learn the benefits of marriage. Mrs. Muhammad trains professionals around the country in how to use the Basic Training series and is a sought after public speaker. She has worked with organizations around the country to develop coalitions called Community Healthy Marriage Initiatives.

Wedded Bliss Foundation is Ms. Muhammad's vision to bring resources, support and direction to the Black community so healthy marriages become the norm rather than the exception. Her goal is to help those in most need of marriage education services be able to form and sustain healthy marriages.

**Mary Myrick** is the Project Director for the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center. As an Accredited Public Relations Professional (APR), Ms. Myrick is the Founder and President of Public Strategies (PSI) an Oklahoma-based project management and social marketing firm (with offices in the D.C. area, Colorado, and Texas). PSI has national, state and local clients from the public, private and non-profit sectors. She and her team of over 100 employees provide a variety of services including strategic planning, project management, advocacy, program development, technical assistance, event planning and public relations. Under Ms. Myrick's leadership, PSI has worked closely with senior policy officials to develop the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, a program nationally recognized as the first statewide, comprehensive effort to deliver information and education services designed to strengthen relationships and

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marriage, with a focus on low-income families. Its latest program, Family Expectations, is a large federal demonstration project, designed to provide marriage education for low-income couples during and immediately following pregnancy, with the goal of developing a model for statewide replication. Ms. Myrick also leads efforts to provide technical assistance to other agencies and organizations conducting marriage-related projects, including the ACF's National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, MDRC (Supporting Healthy Marriage), Mathematica Policy Research (Building Strong Families) and Pal-Tech (Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative).

**Patrick Patterson** is the Program Manager for the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, Public Strategies, Inc. Prior to joining PSI, Mr. Patterson worked for the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in the Philadelphia regional office with responsibility for Healthy Marriage, Fatherhood, and Community and Faith-based grantees and initiatives for the six states (VA, WV, MD, DC, DE, and PA) within the region. Before entering federal service, Mr. Patterson was Program Manager for the Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina Statewide Fatherhood Initiative, a multi-year, \$8 million initiative in the state. Mr. Patterson has trained statewide, nationally, and internationally on father absence and its impact on families. His efforts to address father absence have garnered local, state, and national attention, highlighted by a special face-to-face meeting with President George W. Bush to discuss father absence and its impact on families. Mr. Patterson earned his master's degrees in Social Work and Public Health from the University of South Carolina.

**Dana Vickers Shelley** is the Director of Strategic Communications at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. In this capacity, Ms. Shelley oversees a comprehensive public affairs program that includes media relations, Web communications and publications.

Ms. Shelley has had extensive experience developing strategies to help politicians and government officials meet organizational goals, and help corporate leaders meet business objectives. Prior to joining Casey, Ms. Shelley served as a senior manager at Edelman Public Relations Worldwide and Fenton Communications, both in Washington, D.C. She has provided communications counsel for clients such as the Coca-Cola Company Task Force, Ford Foundation, NAACP National Voter Fund, Nike, DaimlerChrysler, Discovery Communications and Prince George's County Government (MD).

From 1993-1997, Dana served in senior communications positions in the Clinton Administration, where she directed on-site media affairs for international business missions led by the Secretary of Commerce to Africa, China, Europe, South America and the Middle East. She also managed outreach efforts in the White House Office of Public Liaison to communicate administration programs and initiatives to African-American and Hispanic citizens. Earlier, she was director of public affairs at Black Enterprise magazine, the spokesperson for the D.C.



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Lottery Board and the special assistant to the chairman of the Democratic National Committee. A journalism graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Dana is on the board of the Communications Network and a member of the Public Relations Society of America, the National Association of Black Journalists, and the Native American Journalists Association.

**Dr. Rosario Slack** is a much sought-after speaker who travels across the country to conduct seminars in the areas of marriage, fathering and other issues that profoundly impact children and families. Along with his wife, Chattanooga pediatrician, Dr. Angela Smith-Slack, he has developed a ten session guide to building better relationships called 10 Great Dates for Black Couples based on the award-winning program, 10 Great Dates, by David and Claudia Arp. Dr. Slack works with a cross section of people, challenging them to develop healthy, wholesome family, marital, and dating relationships. Dr. Slack received his masters and doctorate degrees from Interdenominational Theological Center at the Atlanta University Center. He is the pastor of Temple of Faith Deliverance Church of God in Christ, volunteers for various community organizations, and serves on several organizational boards. The Slacks are the parents of three children, Will, Pamela and Taylor.



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