



**national  
healthy marriage  
resource center**

## **Healthy Marriage, Strong Families and Child Wellbeing**

### **Healthy Marriage in Culturally and Racially Diverse Populations**

Transcript

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# Healthy Marriage in Culturally and Racially Diverse Populations

## Proceedings

(9:00 a.m.)

**MS. MYRICK:** Good morning. We'll get started this morning. First of all, I want to welcome you and thank you for taking time out of your very busy schedules to be here particularly those of you who work on the Hill. I know this is a very busy time as you're wrapping up and trying to get to the end of this period of the session. As we start this morning though I want to take a few minutes to offer some thank yous so you'll know who helped us get to this room. I want to start by thanking the Brookings Center on Children and Families, particularly Ron Haskins and Julie Clover for the work they have done in helping us put this series together for you. I'd also like to thank our cooperating organizations for this briefing series which include Child Trends, the National Conference on State Legislators, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, and CLASP. All of those organizations have really helped us again learn how to frame these kinds of briefings for you as it's our first attempt at this kind of effort.

I do want to thank the Administration for Children and Families for the funding they provide to the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center. And this morning I especially want to thank the Annie E. Casey Foundation who funds this briefing series, and Carol Thompson who is here this morning who is our project officer and has provided great guidance to us about how this might be helpful and useful to you.

And also this morning from the Annie E. Casey Foundation we have Dana Vickers Shelley who is the Strategic Communications Director, and she'll be our moderator this morning and you'll learn a little bit more about her in a moment.

My name is Mary Myrick, and I'm the Project Director for the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center. I spend most of my time on the road around the country visiting Healthy Marriage Programs, but sometimes I live in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. I want to thank the members of the Resource Center team who might be here this morning. We have partners with ICF Caliber, the Lewin Group, and the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. So thank you all for the work you do to make the resource center what it is.

I want to talk about just for a second the goals of this series. In 2002, ACF began funding Healthy Marriage Programs and since that time they have funded about 300 programs in communities and cities across this country. As this new public policy area was evolving we decided that it was time to start sharing some of what was being learned because there really hadn't been any follow up to those initial discussions about what this policy initiative might look like. We then began to talk to many of you about what information you thought would be helpful and what questions you thought people might have about this initiative. We decided as a result to focus on three key topics on which people had questions about what this might be and what this might not be.

So we began the briefing series in May. At that first meeting Ron Haskins led a panel of researchers who focused on how healthy marriage affects child wellbeing and family including Kristin Moore and Robert Lerman. Equally as important, we had two parent- couples, one from Baltimore, Maryland, and one from Oklahoma City, and program administrators who shared their experiences of participating in two healthy marriage programs in these cities. One of the couples was not married, one was married, and both of them talked about the impact this had had on their couple relationship and also their family.

In July, Oliver Williams and Anne Menard from the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence partnered with us and the panelists talked about how and why the domestic violence community was working closely with healthy marriage programs across the country to make sure that these services were done in a way that participants were safe and that they also had an opportunity to learn about what healthy relationships might look like. At that briefing we were also able to meet a program participant from Wisconsin who shared her experience about participating in a healthy marriage program where she learned about what a healthy relationship looked like, and as a result she left an abusive relationship. At the same time we saw video clips of fathers who shared their experiences about being involved with abusive relationships and we were able to talk about ways that these programs were helping to create healthy models for a different way of thinking about how relationships might play out. If you missed either of those, you can follow up by going to the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center website where there are transcripts and audiotapes of this briefings, so it'll be almost like being there except there won't be food!

Today we're focusing on the third issue that people really had questions about and that was the cultural competence of these programs. When the first healthy marriage programs were introduced, for the most part they had been developed for, and had been implemented in, middle class white family communities for couples in that community. As ACF and states began funding programs, people began to ask questions about whether these same kinds of services work for more vulnerable populations. Since then a number of things have been done to address those concerns and to make sure that disadvantaged a culturally diverse populations could benefit and that the services would be relevant and effective for them. You're going to hear today from panelists who will talk about how they've been involved in adapting program design, outreach activities, curricula, and other things to make sure that these services are relevant to the people that they serve. I'm very excited about this work and think you will be as well.

Then the final thing I want to say is that there are people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds who have participated in these programs around the country, and we could not focus on them all today. But today we're going to focus on African American, Latino, and Native American populations. We know, however, that there are Asian Pacific Americans, refugees and migrants from places like Africa, the Middle East, and Central Europe, who have participated in healthy marriage and relationship programs and at some point we hope to share their stories as well. So I did want to say that this group today is representative of the kind of work that's being done, but certainly not all inclusive of what is happening to adapt these programs.

With that I'd like to turn the program over to Patrick Patterson who is the Program Manager for the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, and he is the person on a day to day basis who makes sure that the Resource Center works and meets the needs that you have. Patrick, take it away.

**MR. PATTERSON:** Thank you, Mary. Good morning. It's Friday.

I want to do a couple things, first again to join Mary in welcoming you all to our briefing. This is our third seminar this year. We are very pleased. Some of us see this as graduation for the year because we've put a lot of work into this. We've done our homework in advance about how we focus these topics and we're very delighted to you got here to join us. One of the things I want to bring your attention is that each of you should have received a binder as you walked in with different kinds of background material we hope you will find useful. One item in particular is the Introductory Guide to the ACF Healthy Marriage Initiative which describes the range of programs and research that ACF has funded since 2002.

The first tabs focused on information related to each of the three seminars Tab 2 focuses on the first briefing that we had that Mary talked , Tab 3 three tab focuses on our Domestic Violence and Healthy Marriage briefing. And if you go to tab four, you'll see that we have the resources information related to today's briefing This includes the bios of our presenters, and some information about the programs they will talk about. Our agenda will follow as it reads. We'll have the first panel that will answer questions after their presentations, and then we'll have a second panel. We'll make a shift where our second panel of presenters will come up and also field questions after their presentations.

I want to bring your attention to the seminar evaluation forms should be in your chairs. It is really important to us that you give us your feedback. There are two doors and the evaluation form is your ticket to get out of this room! You will not leave without giving us your evaluation, so please take the time to fill out the evaluations as we conclude.

My last duty which I'm pleased to do this morning is to introduce our moderator. We're very delighted to have Ms. Dana Vickers Shelley join us as our moderator. Dana has extensive experience in public affairs working in both the business, private, and political sectors. She's worked in the Clinton administration here as well as abroad, and is now Director of Strategic Communications at the Annie E. Casey Foundation which is one of our supporters for the Resource Center. She is a masterful communicator, and we are privileged and delighted to have her join us as our moderator. So please join me in welcoming Dana Vickers Shelley as our moderator.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Good morning. To be heard is key to communication isn't it? Good morning again.

What I'd like to do is start with posing questions to Diann Dawson who is Director of Regional Operations at the Administration for Children and Families where she provides leadership and direction across the country to 10 regional offices. Most important for our seminar today, she is the co founder and lead of the African Ameri-

can Healthy Marriage Initiative. Welcome, Diann.

**MS. DAWSON:** Thank you.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Diann, in your training as a lawyer and social worker and as a civil servant in the government working for both Democrats and Republicans, you've seen a lot of initiatives I'm sure come and go perhaps. I'm just wondering for our audience as we begin today if you could tell us what was your first reaction when Wade Horn announced the Healthy Marriage Initiative at the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families? What was your first reaction?

**MS. DAWSON:** I guess my reaction was probably like most folks, I was saying what does the government have to do with marriage? I was amazed at some of the conversations. As Wade began to make the case for marriage and what it meant for the wellbeing of children, I really took it seriously and began to listen and it started to make a lot of sense. It made a lot of sense to me because as Dana mentioned in terms of my resume, I have been working in government at state and federal levels in social welfare for some 30 some years and when I started to think about what it meant to have strong families, some of the things that I really thought about most was that if we had strong families we wouldn't have the disproportionate number of our children in the child welfare system.

Again to think about it, if we had both mom and dad and they were employed and they were able to sustain and strengthen their families, we wouldn't have some of the other issues that we have to deal with. So as I began to think about those issues in the context, I began to think about it like why not look at relationships and what it might mean to have stronger families.

I think it got real for me when I attended the first Smart Marriages conference and I realized that there were people who had been studying and researching (these issues) and had developed curricula. This was indeed a marriage "movement" and there were no black people present at the conference. I asked myself, how did we not know about this or how were we not involved? . I think, Diana, from the standpoint of looking at the fact that there were so many issues that I felt weren't addressed, that if we were to look at this issue from the African American community perspective, we needed to talk about some other things that were not being discussed in that particular venue.

So I went back to Wade with my colleagues and we talked about if this was going to be something that really was intended to be for all communities then we would have to have a discussion with the community and we would have to address those issues in a culturally competent way.

**MS. SHELLEY:** I understand that three of the African American ACF Regional Administrators, Carlos Williams, Joyce Thompson and Leon McGowan agreed to work with you to really launch a marriage initiative designed for and with the African American community. Why did you think that it was important to do this specifically with that team and what were your goals when you began?

**MS. DAWSON:** For one reason, they report to me, so that was real easy!

**MS. SHELLEY:** So you immediately had their support?

**MS. DAWSON:** That's a good way to start something. But I do think we all shared some of the same thinking. When you look at the statistics, it was real for us when you think about the number of single heads of households in the African American community, the high out of wedlock birth rate, and the association with all the families we were serving in the ACF system in terms of needing the income support and the other things. But we also know that to have that discussion we couldn't talk about it just in terms of deficits. We had to really think hard about how could we have a conversation that was so desperately needed but it had to be addressed in a (culturally) competent way.

We knew it was never going to go over if it was about white people telling black people how to be married or to marry. It just was not going to work! So one of the things that we did is that we decided that we really needed to bring a group of people together to help us think about how to develop that blueprint going forth and thinking about this being a national conversation around marriage, the wellbeing and the benefits of marriage and why we needed to reconsider marriage in our (African American) communities.

The first step the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative took was to hold a roundtable for two days meeting with a diverse group of people. They were leaders from academia, they were from the faith community, they were from the arts, they were young. We just sat around a table for 2 days and talked about how do we think about addressing this issue in our community. As a result of it, we went back to our team, and began to think about a strategy-- how we could use our influence as, first of all, people who worked in the government, but also who were of the community and could speak to these issues and think about what was the best way to begin to engage the community.

**MS. SHELLEY:** In the policy community we often use the words "cultural competence," and we use that with quotations on either side. What do you think that phrase means, and why is that important? Why is cultural competency important?

**MS. DAWSON:** Let me talk about it in terms of what I think cultural competence means in the context of marriage and the strategies for marriage in the African American community. It's so important, and I think we can see this especially when you look at the political debate going on. That's the most interesting thing to me that I've ever seen. And you think about the issues around how do you get information and share it so that people can connect to it, that they can identify with it, that they can see it in the context of their own lives and in the shared experiences as a group. For African Americans, there's a lot of shared history and a lot of it comes out of the enslaved experience in this country, the racial discrimination, and so when you start talking about how do you talk about (healthy marriage) you know that that's always in the backdrop of how people see themselves and see their lives and see their experiences and therefore see their families. How do you begin to look at that in a way that you come to it knowing that you speak to it in the context of that experience?

I think that that's what has to be done. I remember the first time that a Latino person said where is the Latino Healthy Marriage Initiative one? I said I can't do that. We will need to find somebody else to lead that because there are lots of other experiences that I would not feel. So again that's sort of why we came to it, not that it was a mandate even though it was a government priority, but we felt that this was important, we knew that the issues were complex, and that we needed to take this seriously about how do we as a community look at the issues and also look at how we could resolve some of the problems.

**MS. SHELLEY:** As the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative was conducted with all different kinds of activities from regional conferences and you worked with the religious community and other folks, I'm wondering did you have challenges in trying to sell this to the African American community when you went either to pastors or civic leaders or residents in communities? What was that experience like?

**MS. DAWSON:** Yes, and we still do. But I can tell you part of our strategy was to go directly to the communities to look at developing a coalition strategy. We have met so many wonderful people all over this country who care about this issue, who are doing this work even though they didn't get a federal grant. I think that we are now beginning to see some of the national organizations that we knew really could bring and contribute to this discussion beginning to come on board. That probably has been the biggest challenge, the organizations that you think naturally who have constituencies, that that would be an easier way to bring the conversation. But it has required us to do this from the bottom up. I think that there is still a lot we can do with the faith community. I think a lot of it is people know that these are issues but they just don't know how to do it.

So as we have developed the initiative and as we have begun to get some of the research that's more targeted and focused to the African American community, we're able now to be one of the players who can bring some of those resources to the various groups who want to participate but just haven't figured out how to come to the table and the conversation.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Thank you, Diann. In our next couple of minutes I wanted to ask as a last question at this point what do you think are the one or two most important lessons that you've learned through working with the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative about the relevance of the Healthy Marriage Initiative overall that apply to the African American community?

**MS. DAWSON:** I think one of the lessons clearly is that it is relevant, very relevant. I think the other lesson is that there's a lot of interest in this work. There is interest from the young people, there's interest from men, women, and as I say, the young people. I think that they see the value in committing themselves to being a part of the programs and the services. I think we have seen that a lot of people think they see themselves as mentors, that they have something to contribute. I think that people are more open to learning more information about it. And I think that another lesson is that when you bring these conversations to people and use others who can speak to their audiences that people get it. It's not difficult for people to understand a relationship.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Terrific. Now I'd like to move on to introduce Frank Fuentes. Like Diann, you've worked for



many years in the federal government in different positions with different administrations. Currently you're Deputy Director of Head Start and the lead for the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative (HHMI). You've seen a variety of initiatives come and go. I guess I'd start with the same question. What was your response when Wade Horn said, hi, Frank, guess what we're going to start doing?

**MR. FUENTES:** When Wade launched this initiative I had known him for about 15 years and I thought he had gone out of his mind, to be honest. What reinforced that was the early dialogue in the press and in the community's reaction from the different interest groups and national organizations. I said to myself I have enough work to do. I don't need to get myself involved in this.

But after 34 years of working in primarily human service, child and family programs, early Head Start, Head Start Child Care, runaway homeless youth, domestic violence, what became very, very clear, and most importantly as the rhetoric modified itself and became more encompassing and nuanced, my reaction was the same as Diann's. It's like this makes sense.

I had spent at that point about 30 years working on the deficits and approaching the needs of families from that perspective and here was truly for the first time some effort at the flip side of the point from a preventative standpoint that would begin to address really some of the very root causes of why we had Head Start and child abuse and neglect and foster care and all of those sort of corrective programs for what is best for kids. So when it became about what is best for children I had no problem signing up.

**MS. SHELLEY:** What relevance do you see that healthy marriage goals in general have for the Latino and Hispanic populations?

**MR. FUENTES:** What I've learned and experienced is that it has resonated to the core of the Latino community. One of the first things that Wade asked me to do was to take six months before launching an Hispanic initiative and travel the country and talk to lots of different communities, different leaders, different individuals, and so I did that. I would have to say with rare exception the response was, "Where have you been and why has it taken so long? We have needed this." It didn't matter whether I talked with people who were working with at risk youth or folks who were providing child care or people who were running child protective services. What they kept saying time and time again is our money comes in these categorical silos and what we really need to do is to engage the parents but we don't have the resources or we are constrained from doing so. So here was a real avenue for folks to begin to address these very critical needs.

I believe that the reason is, quite honestly, that there is still in the Latino community a strong core value of family which is also one of the differences that I wanted to make sure that this initiative understood as we went forward in the Latino community. So a lot of the research that we've done in the HHMI, a lot of the technical assistance, is really first identifying what those unique aspects of this core value of family in the Latino community and to build on that because we were beginning to see some real erosions in that area. Sixty percent of Hispanic women 15 to 58 are or have been married. So you can see that there is a huge commitment to the

institution of marriage in the Latino community. However, the divorce rates are no better, perhaps marginally better. But we began to see issues of the dropout rate which is twice that of anybody else, (very high) out of wedlock birth rates--- lots of these indicators that lead to a perpetuation of poverty , so that 33 percent of the Hispanic kids in this country are still living in poverty.

So when you talk about this Healthy Marriage initiative and how the research is showing that, all things being equal, you can begin to turn these trends around, it was really very relevant both in terms of what we were seeing in the community, but also to build on the strengths of the Latino culture.

**MS. SHELLEY:** And something that I wanted to ask along the lines as you were just bringing up culture, I know when you did your initial listening tour talking with various folks in the community, what were some of the key issues that you saw that were particularly germane in the Latino population in terms of communication, culture, et cetera?

**MR. FUENTES:** Obviously language is one of the first things, but being bilingual is not going to be enough. You really need to understand the culture and the relevance and the experience of the families that are coming. I hate to say that sometimes we have professionals particularly that come from other Latin American countries who speak the language but can't quite connect with the reality of the Hispanic population that is here immigrating here because there is this huge social divide. So speaking the language is important but not by itself. (Equally important ) is to understand the culture, being able to take curricula that as Diann said that were developed for middle class Anglo couples and families and to adapt that in a way that is relevant and responsive to the Hispanic community.

One of the key aspects that we learned early on and confirmed since was the issue of immigration, another unique difference. The immigrant experience—36 percent of the Hispanic population is immigrant—the impact of acculturation, the fact that 38 percent of the 44 million Hispanics in this country are 18 years old or younger; the fact that many of our services don't allow us to spend federal money on reaching that youth population when we know that they in the Latino community marry and have children much younger than anybody else. So these are some of the lessons that we've learned and the aspects of the initiative that we have tried to address again through written materials, conferences, technical assistance, to not just Hispanic organizations that are serving Latinos, but to non Hispanic organizations that need to understand how best to engage with them, and that the messenger is just important as the message.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Thank you. What I'd like to ask as a next question and then ask Diann to respond to this as well, what would you like to tell the new administration, the next Congress? Everyone in the room is going to be asked this question. When you are in front of the next President, what are you going to say about the directions you think the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative and what the country can learn from that?

**MR. FUENTES:** I think first of all just to make it clear, I'm a civil servant so I'm not telling any particular party anything, got to put that disclaimer there!

**MS. SHELLEY:** Let's assume this is January 25, 2009.

**MR. FUENTES:** January 25. Being asked my advice, what I would say is that there is a resounding need (for this agenda) in the country. We believe this from the statistics and Dr. La Hoz, who will be part of the next panel, I think can confirm the kind of demand that is out there and the urgency of the need. The fact that we continue to need research focused on the Hispanic population. There has been a dearth of research not just on this issue but allied areas. With our partners in the department and ACF we've launched an evaluation of the current Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative, but we need to build on what that tells us. So I think more attention from that perspective and clearly to look at moving the Healthy Marriage Initiative to encompass all aspects of the life of families.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Terrific. Thank you. Diann, let me ask you as well regarding the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative.

**MS. DAWSON:** I think I would say based on some of the lessons that we've learned already—even though we don't have all of the conclusions about how well these programs have been implemented—that it's very clear that we need more so that the programs can be delivered where the people live, that we need to have these programs more culturally sensitive to the issues. That doesn't mean in my opinion that they have to be delivered solely by African Americans but that we need more of the programs so that more of the people who have implemented curricula can look like the community. And that we need to tailor more of these programs for the youth, that programs for adults are not the same for youth and that there's such a great need for that.

And that we need to develop these programs with the community. They can't just be canned programs. I think that says to me that there needs to be a continual commitment to funding these programs at the federal level. I think that research is another area. I've been really amazed as we've tried to identify and bring African American researchers to this work that there's a lot of interest but there's just not the funding to support a lot of it at the scale that we need it.

I would say to the new administration that one of the things is I think that we need to continue to support the research in this area. I think that we need to do what we can to encourage more state and more local funding of the programs as well as the private sector because I do think that this marriage education, and the research and all of the other strategies that we've implemented that it needs to be an arsenal of tools that we have to address some of the issues and help families in terms of poverty as well as health outcomes. So that's what I would say.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Terrific. I think what we'd like to do is open it up to questions to the audience if you have questions that you'd like to raise with either of our panelists. While you're thinking of this questions what I'll do is let Diann and Frank who

**MR. FUENTES:** Can I put in a plug?

**MS. SHELLEY:** I was going to say this is an opportunity for the two of you to have a couple of discussions just between yourselves as the audience thinks of what questions it might want to ask. It's Friday and people are thinking of maybe next week's debate that they're going to be turned into as well. But this isn't a debate. We're on the same page.

**MR. FUENTES:** I just wanted to share with you (holds up written materials from the HHMI), and hopefully you'll pick these up as you leave or you've gotten as you came in, it's just one of the examples of the materials that we have put together to be of assistance in forum, educate and motivate, particularly the large number of Healthy Marriage grantees that are serving Hispanic populations but don't really have inroads into the community or have staff that help them do that. So this is designed as some successful efforts on the part of just a few. This is a work in progress. We will continue to add to this information, but again, one more example of what we have learned both from research as well as from looking at the experience of the practitioners.

**MS. GOLDSTEIN:** I'm Naomi Goldstein and I work with Diana and Frank at the Administration on Children and Families. Through much of the time that we interact, it's about everyday stuff which keeps us all very busy. I'm well aware that you both have to paint this bigger picture, visionary role. I am actually very interested in how you have maintained your momentum and your ability to focus and give time to this kind of work in light of the day to day pressure.

**MR. FUENTES:** Ladies first.

**MS. DAWSON:** I live by this quadrant, the things you have to do and all of that, but I truly focus and I try to think of the things that really make an impact and make a difference so that it just forces me to make sure that I'm doing some of that work in that quadrant. It is tough in many ways and especially tough when you don't have the money to do some of the things that you know would be ideal. But I think I'm encouraged every day when I get calls from people and they still want to know, How do I become a part of the AAHMI? And I'm like it really is not a thing. You know what I mean? It's just fascinating and I just find that that's what keeps me going because I do know that this is an idea whose time has come and that people are working on these issues and thinking about this and really trying to figure out how they can personally commit themselves, and it makes me know that I have to personally commit myself in terms of my time. So it's been one of the most fulfilling experiences I've had.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Just to remind everyone, and Ms. Goldstein set the perfect example, please speak up and identify yourself before you ask your question or make your comment.

**SPEAKER:** Andrea Kane with the National Campaign for the Prevention of Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. I'd be interested, Diann, you talked a little bit about some of the particular interests you're hearing from youth. I think Frank you mentioned that a little bit too. I'd be interested to hear a little bit more about what are you hearing from young people. What do you think we need to do differently when we're trying to reach young people rather than adults who already have children? What's your vision for the next couple of years on what

we need to in that area?

**MS. SHELLEY:** What I'm going to do is start with Frank to respond to that.

**MR. FUENTES:** Actually, I was thinking about my answer to the other question, but that's all right. I just went out to Chicago and visited Dr. La Hoz's program, Family Bridges. The first session that we went to was a junior high school ninth grade class and watched these 12 year olds express a depth of experience and understanding that just blew me away. They talked about the core values of a beginning relationship, a growing relationship, and then a mature relationship. Unselfishness was one of the cores. So they said when you get married, part of that commitment is not being selfish, and one little girl said there are a lot of selfish married people. Then they brought up commitment. Commitment is about the long term and so on and so forth. And another little girl said commitment goes away because people get divorced all the time. She talked about love and how love is "I love chocolate, I love my mother, I love my wife, I love my girlfriend, it's all the same word". So she broke it down which really blew me away into "Eros and Agape" and tried to put some English terms to those two distinctions.---does this belong under lust or does it belong under love? So they did that little exercise. Then she showed them this picture and said, Tell me where this one belongs. It was a young woman sitting on a fellow's lap. They were looking at each other smiling at one another. The fellow had his hand on her knee. She had her arms around his back. She said, 'Where does this one belong?' So a couple of kids said he's got his hand on her knee. That's got to be lust. But they finally came down to, no, that was love. Then she flashed this other one with a bare chested guy, a young woman with a halter top, midriff all hanging out all over each other. So this one little boy just jumped and said, "That is lust!"

They took that curriculum and turned it into the reality of a very poor neighborhood and the children who live with these realities day in and day out, and I think that we need to look at the flexibilities that we could put into these programs and build on that experience of what is working and where does that take us next. As I mentioned for the Latino community, it is not unusual to have a 17 year old husband and a 16 year old wife. So how do we make sure that we are getting that information about choices and options and skills to them early enough which in many instances we can't right now? So I think we need to look at that aspect of reaching kids.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Thank you. Diann?

**MS. DAWSON:** Just a couple of things, Andrea. Our young people, many of them don't see a lot of success in relationships. They haven't seen a lot of success. So they are very interested in wanting to know can they not make that same mistake. So I think from the standpoint of what adults can do and help in terms of with young people's interest in their relationships and that kind of thing is that, first of all, is being honest and sharing with them. I think what we have tried to do is also give them successful models, have some mentors the kids feel comfortable talking to. Because I think many times we have forgotten to share our own experiences. That it's not easy to be married. It takes work, all of what goes into making sure that you try to have a successful marriage, and the kids are interested.

What I'm finding is that they're interested at ages that I wouldn't even think that would be thinking about, but they live in a different time than when I grew up when you just assumed that mom and dad were going to be there and that was just that, where else could they go kind of thinking. So we live in a very different time and I do think that the fact that we believe that we can impart some education and some skills and that people can learn what it takes even if they haven't always seen that experience is something that I think is very hopeful about this marriage work.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Excellent. I want to thank our panelists for the first part of the program this morning. Please join me in thanking them. Thank you very much. I'd like to have our next panel please come up and we'll get situated.

See what happens when you sit on the front row at a session? You get asked to participate in the discussion. Welcome. We're getting started. We're going to start with our next session and introduce Ms. Nisa Muhammad who is Director of the Wedded Bliss Foundation right here in Washington, D.C., as well as Dr. Rosario Slack from Chattanooga, Tennessee, who will talk about some of the work they've done in providing educational workshops and speaking to African American audiences directly and both independently and together about fatherhood, marriage, and couple relationships here around the country in fact.

And I understand that you have co authored a curriculum specifically for African Americans. As you'll note in your materials there is a lot of resource information both online and hard copy that you can have access to. I'll start with Ms. Muhammad. Good morning.

**MS. MUHAMMAD:** Good morning.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Tell us a little bit about how you got involved in the work.

**MS. MUHAMMAD:** Thank you. I want to thank the organizers for allowing me to participate in this most needed discussion. The Wedded Bliss Foundation is a community based organization created to help teens, singles, and couples develop healthy relationships and healthy marriages to better the outcomes for children. To help more children to grow up with the benefits of a two parent family, we provided classes, workshops, seminars, and professional training locally and around the country.

Our signature program is Black Marriage Day which is held annually the fourth Sunday in March and it's an opportunities for cities and community organizations to celebrate marriage in the black community. Next year will be our seventh celebration and we'll have more than 200 cities participating. The theme is First Comes Love Guiding Our Youth to Marriage.

I want to speak about the work that we do with teens. A couple of years ago, Joy Jones wrote in the "Washington Post" that after interviewing a 14 year old black boy that he said, "Marriage is for white people." Of course, those of us sitting here know that is clearly not true. But imagine living in a world where marriage is not even

seen as an option, a world where you don't know anyone who's married, none of your friends' parents are married, and the people who have brief encounters sometimes called relationships often end with the result of having children.

Imagine growing up never going to a wedding, never watching a couple share in the joy of committing themselves 'til death do you part. That's the world many black youth find themselves in. If you just look at the statistics, you might think that black people are not interested in marriage. We have the lowest marriage rate, the highest divorce rate, and the highest out of wedlock child birth rates. But if you look behind the numbers you'll see the hurt, the pain, and often times the confusion of people who want healthy relationships that in fact may lead to healthy marriages, but they just don't know how to get there successfully and they have few cultural cues to help them get there.

Once upon a time children sang a song "Michael and Janice sitting in the tree, you can finish, k i s s i n g. First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Janice with the baby carriage." It was a cultural cue that guided them toward marriage and gave them the steps to get there. But today those cultural cues are missing. There were popular songs back then, the songs of the Temptations, the Supremes, the Four Tops, they had love songs that became classics. It's a different time today. There's Usher with "Love in the Club," Lil Wayne with "Lollipop," and T.I. With "Anything You Want." These are artists with songs that offer sex without responsibility.

When I work with teens I ask them to modernize that childhood song. What would it look like today? They say first comes sex, then comes the baby, then comes the breakup, and marriage is nowhere around. Something is missing that is desperately needed. If we don't give them a roadmap to marriage, a guide to healthy relationships, or a path to avoid poverty, how will they ever get there? And if they do, it's hit or miss and more misses than hits.

This targeted approach is necessary and it works. I want to introduce you to Jamal and Tanika. He's 19, she's 18, and they have a 2 year old. I met them both last year at the Washington Hospital Center where I do a program for pregnant and parenting teens called Better Together. The goal is to help couples stay together if they have a child with the hopes that when they are ready for marriage they will consider each other as opposed to normally they break up and find somebody else. And if they do decide to break up that in fact they can successfully co parent their child.

I saw Tanika again this summer at a program I was doing for the Mayor's Youth Employment Program and my workshop was called Why Marriage Matters. In the middle of the workshop she raised her hand and said, Guess what? And I'm like, What? She said, I got married. I'm like, What? I was stunned. She saw my shock and said, You said it was the best place to raise my daughter. I believed you. And I was like, Yeah, I did say that. And, yeah, it is that, and it is the best place. I just didn't know you would do it so soon. She replied, No one has ever talked to me about marriage. She said, We did it and I like it.

Marriage may not be right for every 18 and 19 year old. It may not be right for most. But the discussion about marriage, the idea, the concept, and the possibilities are so right and they definitely need to be discussed. Thank you.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Thank you. Ms. Muhammad. Now I turn to Rev. Dr. Slack, I just wanted to ask you both to comment on what have you learned are the key messages that have to be conveyed when you're talking about marriage with young people?

**DR. SLACK:** There are so many. I think the key with young people, and I've heard a lot of talk about it, what's remarkable to me is how things have swung toward young people wanting to be married. Now a lot of people who are older, who worked with the generation that didn't have an interest in marriage, are sometimes dealing with this new generation like they're the same group of people. So I think the whole issue of being a consistent messenger, being a credible messenger, and like Nisa implied, having expectations.

I'm always amazed even as much as I work with people, being a preacher, I'm just used to people not paying to what I say. So when they actually come around and do what I say, what a wonderful joy!. But the young people who are thirsty for this message hold our feet to the fire because they watch everything that we do. And I think for many of us, the adage should be "Do more than we say"-- and just recognize that they're watching us and they're watching our lives.

I just have one anecdote about my daughter who was five at the time, Taylor, my youngest. One day my wife and I were sitting in the kitchen and Taylor looked up and she said, "Mama, did you and daddy get married three times?" And it kind of caught my wife off-guard but I knew where she was going. So Angie said, "What did you say?" She said, "Did you and daddy get married three times?" And Angie went on this long dissertation about how people get married and they have children and all that. She said, "Why did you ask?" Taylor said, "I was just wondering how you got all three of us". She made the connection because at that early age of 5 she's always heard from us that you get married first, and then you have children and because we have three children she assumed that we did it three times! And it struck me that this little girl is listening to what I'm saying but she's also watching the interaction with her mother and I who did it that way.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Did you want to comment on that, Nisa?

**MS. MUHAMMAD:** I was going to say that it's important to at least put the message out there and be brave enough to say "marriage" to your people. Because a lot of times we think they're not ready for marriage. Let's just talk to them about relationships and we'll save marriage for a later point in time. It's kind of like algebra. My son is in high school and he said, "Why do I have to take algebra?" He said, "I'm never going to use algebra. It has no bearing on my life." I said, "You may not need algebra right now, but you will later on".

That's why we need to talk about marriage now because they may not need it right now, they may not need the information right now, but the life lessons and the information that they can learn about skill building, com-



munication, managing conflict, commitment, is definitely information that they can learn later on in life. I do a couples group here in D.C. and we just started a new group at Kelley Miller Middle School. This last Tuesday, we ate dinner first, and about eight or nine teenagers came in our group and we're like asking "what are they doing here?" So we took them outside and we said this group is for the parents, and they said "we're parents". We said we didn't mean that kind of parents. This is for the adult parents. They said "But where's the program for us? We're parents. We want to have good marriages and we want to have healthy relationships. Where's our program?" And we were dumbfounded because they had heard about the program and just showed up. But because they had such a thirst for it, now we started a program for these kids because in that community teen pregnancy is predominant. It's a norm almost in a lot of communities but there are no services and resources for them to help guide them to have a successful relationship with their child's parent, and if and when they're ready for marriage to consider their child's parents. So the need is just great and this information is just necessary.

**MS. SHELLEY:** As you were both talking about conveying information, are the messages different when you're speaking with African American men compared to African American women?

**DR. SLACK:** Yes.....

**MS. SHELLEY:** Please elaborate for our audience.

**DR. SLACK:** I'd be glad to. For probably 40 years at least there's been what appears to be a concentrated effort to disentangle men from families. The whole definition of families became a woman and her children. So there was not really a place for a lot of men to be involved and if they were involved they had to act like they weren't involved in some communities, but particularly low income communities so that the mother could get the (financial) benefit for their children. It became apparent that there was no place for a lot of men and so they started acting out in some ways that landed them in trouble. So you've got child support issues, you've got low educational attainment, you've got other issues that prevent them from taking part in the mainstream.

So men have had a hard time knowing what their place was.

At the same time, black women became the providers, became the ones who were involved in the children's lives, and so in my humble opinion, children then became the product of females primarily. So men didn't have this influence on young people and I think a lot of the at risk behaviors came as a result of the absence of the black man and so now we're trying to put that back together is challenging, but we've got to have a targeted message to let them know that there is a place and there's a need and that things can change with their presence.

**MS. MUHAMMAD:** I think part of the message that's important to get to black women is that the same skills that we learn on the job are the not the same skills that it takes to be successful at home, that it's a whole different type of skill-set, a whole different type of information that's needed, and that marriage can work and it

can be successful and that is where the bliss can be had.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Excellent. Thank you very much. Now I'd like to talk with Alicia La Hoz who is with the Family Bridges Program in Chicago. The Family Bridges Program is funded through the Administration for Children and Families and you provide a lot of educational initiatives and services across the Chicago area to the Latino community and I guess you work with 11 or so partner organizations also that are identified in your resource materials book for the seminar.

I'm just curious how do you implement the services overall in working with people in so many different parts of the area?

**DR. LA HOZ:** We work with six counties in the Illinois that represent 50 percent of the population in Illinois. Since the two years we've been funded we've been able to serve a little bit over 10,000 individuals, students, couples, single parents, young adults. And we have done that with the collaboration of 21 partner organizations including a couple of different coalitions that work specifically with the African American community, and a coalition that works with the Latino community. And through this collaboration we've offered the groups within the communities, we've empowered the communities, so that we are offering services in the high schools, and at colleges and universities on campus grounds, back yards, picnics, hospitals, the correctional facilities. Actually someone called and they offered a group within a neighborhood like a block party. So we've offered the groups where the individuals are and we try to bridge whatever gaps or whatever barriers may be present so that the participants can gain and benefit from these groups.

**MS. SHELLEY:** How have you learned to or worked to adapt your programs to be effective with the Hispanic and Latino community?

**DR. LA HOZ:** I don't know if you guys have heard the story of the farmer and the young boy that was walking along a journey and as they walked along the journey the farmer ran into a mom and the mom says to the farmer, "What in the world are you doing having your son walk alongside of you when you have a perfectly good donkey that he could ride along? You need to take care of your boy. He shouldn't be walking so much". And so the farmer listened to the young mom and went ahead and put the boy on the donkey. They continued on the path and he found himself across an older man. The older man said to the farmer, "What are you doing? Don't you know that you are the one that needs to be sitting on the donkey because you're teaching your son not to respect you? He needs to respect you. It shouldn't be the other way around". So the farmer went ahead and listened to the advice and did what he was told.

He continued along the journey and found himself across some labor men and the laborers said, What are you doing to the donkey? You're straining the donkey. He needs to rest up, get his strength because he needs to be ready for the land. And so the farmer listened to the laborers and did as told. He took the donkey, put him across his shoulders, walked along the way, tripped over a rock and what happened to the donkey? It ran away. So obviously sometimes when we say yes to everything, we lose aspects that are important to us.

For the Latino community, saying no to circumstances sometimes can be perceived as a betrayal to the family and to the community. That's one key cultural component that we have found to be critical in understanding the Latino family structure. So while in our healthy marriage programs we have embraced universal concepts of problem solving, communication, and commitment as key in helping families in need, when we have come across issues when a couple has found themselves struggling with whether they pay the mortgage or send money to the family, it's a tough decision because now they have to put their value of their financial situation right hand in hand with the value of their family and so who comes first, the family or their home?

Or what about a couple that all of a sudden has to struggle with their daughter who finds herself pregnant and they are torn apart between making decisions within that situation? So when families find themselves stuck, the issue of problem solving and communication, these skill sets that Family Bridges is bringing to them, it's effective because we are considering these key cultural components and making sure that the person who is delivering the curriculum can identify with their needs and so we strongly emphasize adaptation of the curriculum in order for the facilitator to be better prepared to hone in on these key issues.

We do that directly changing sometimes the names, the stories, the analogies, of the curriculum so that they can be more effective so that folks can identify with them. Or sometimes we go ahead and we integrate some key cultural component. So if I understand that a Latina woman is going to be very assertive and she's going to fight for her daughter, she's going to fight for her son, she's going to fight for her grandmother. She's going to be in the hospital doing everything she can to be assertive for others. But Boy! it is foreign territory to fight for herself and be assertive for herself.

So if I know that that is the case and I need to teach her to be assertive how am I going to do that if I do so from the American standpoint that traditionally says you need to speak for yourself? You need to say "I-messages"... "I need this" etc.. That's a very foreign concept for someone who comes from a Latino culture. So our facilitators have a strong emphasis on culturally adapting that curricula, and thinking critically about these key cultural concepts and how to integrate them so that it makes sense for them. So we say communication is wonderful. How about using "We-messages" instead of "I-messages"? So that is one example of the way we adapt the curriculum. We have our facilitators start off teaching folks how to communicate through a common ground of "We".... We value in our home orderliness, we value in our home these aspects, and therefore we need to make this decision. So through teaching "We-messages" we often times have a little bit more of a leeway and folks who participate can identify more and can apply the skill sets that they need in order to make headway.

So those are some of the examples of ways that we go actively about integrating key cultural components into the curriculum so that they can be relevant, applicable, people can relate to them, and they can actually go ahead and practice these skill sets so that in turn they can be successful in those issues that they need to address.

**MS. SHELLEY:** And because we know how important evaluation of programs is to know how effective they

are, I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit about how your services have been received overall, what some of your evaluation findings have been.

**DR. LA HOZ:** Yes. Eighty one percent of the population that we have served indicated or reported that they earned \$5,000 or less so we know we are serving low income communities. They indicate all sorts of barriers and financial distress. One of the main issues that they talk about-- which goes hand in hand with some of the other national research that's out there-- is that 22 percent of them are reporting financial hardship to be the case and they're earning less than \$5,000 and that makes sense. Parenting is another concern. Communication is another concern. Ongoing stressors of their community is an ongoing concern. We're talking about communities they live in where there's constant violence, so they're not in a safe situation.

Given all of these constraints and problems, our evaluations results are overwhelmingly positive. The educational services that we provide are being absorbed. People want more and more and more. Usually what is happening in our case in Chicago is that participants are telling other participants and we start with a small group and it grows and just continues to overflow. Because the need is so great and they're receiving these services, they're just absorbing it.

So the outcome measures go hand in hand with the positive testimonials that we receive. Of couples who participate in groups, 79 percent of them report they improve conflict resolution skills. We provide outcome measures before and after the pre and post tests and then also follow up after 6 months and 12 months and right now the immediate results indicate that the couples indicate improvement in their communication. Not just that they can tell you what are the three listening skills in good communication, but they're actually applying the skills.

What does that mean? Instead of criticizing each other, instead of blaming each other, they're actually taking the time to listen and speak to one another. Seventy nine percent of them are doing that. Seventy two percent of them are improving their communications skills, and 78 percent have shown improvement in their signs of commitment to each other.

What's interesting is that even though we don't explicitly teach parenting skills in our curricula, 54 percent of them show improvement in that they say that their children are more respectful toward them so that we're seeing immediately some benefits in terms of the dynamics in the home. Individuals report similarly positive outcomes. Seventy four percent of our individuals, those are non-married expectant mothers or young adults, are showing improvement in their communications skills.

And what is very exciting for us is the high school data because we feel that young people are the future, and they're also getting wonderful benefits as well. Seventy nine percent of them indicate improvement in their ability to communicate, and 78 percent of them understand risk and what are toxic relationships, what is dating violence, and what is a safe relationship. So our outcome measures are very favorable and in a few more months we are looking beyond immediate results and looking at the long term measures and we feel those

would be very well documented as well based on what we have so far.

**MS. SHELLEY:** In your response just now you were talking a little bit about dating violence or domestic violence and I'm wondering if you could give a few specific examples of issues that are especially challenging in the Latino population for couples and families that need to be addressed in workshops and other programs.

**DR. LA HOZ:** The issue of power and control is certainly something that we address. Part of the couple dynamic that we find interesting is across couples overall you will see Latino women who get overwhelmed and stressed. We have a lot of angry women who are upset because they carry on a lot of tasks in the home and all of a sudden they came into this culture. It was initially okay for them to assume all of these traditional responsibilities in the home, but then they start working outside the home as well because the demand in the economy requires it. As they start working what happens is they start noticing that other husbands are doing more things to help out in their homes. So their gender role ideology starts shifting.

What happens then? The man in their household perhaps has not experienced a similar cultural change and he continues to assume a traditional Latino standpoint, having continued expectations that his wife needs to continue to do all these things. That creates a lot of stress in the relationship because now his wife comes home and starts nagging and being critical and the husband says I don't like this, talk "to the hand" or I'm going to watch my football. Leave me alone or I'm going to go to the cantina, to the bar to drink," and so escaping from that reality at home because it's very overwhelming. While the husband may receive this situation poorly as a critical putdown but perhaps he does want to provide for the family, perhaps he does want to do all of these things honorably, but the constant nagging he can't absorb and he feels conflicted in a community where he doesn't know how to navigate this new situation he is confronted with. So here the traditional domestic conflict may be aggravated by a husband in this case. Just to give you the scenario I'm using a man with a traditional gender role ideology but, who is tired of the nagging, tired of the criticizing and he may just withdraw completely or become extremely aggressive in light of that tension that is going on in his home.. So with our curricula we need to be very careful. We do a lot of initial screening in terms of domestic violence. All of our different providers and facilitators receive domestic violence training. But in the context of the classes, we also talk about these issues and we spend a lot of time talking about safety in relationships. And as the need arises we make sure we provide referrals that are appropriate for domestic violence support.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Thank you very much, Alicia. Our last presenters are not just professional experts in healthy marriage, but actually know even more about from their own personal experience. They are Pam James and Gordon James who come to us with a rich background in social services working in Indian country with tribal communities and I know they do a lot of training around healthy relationships and have co authored a curriculum. Pam is Director of Leading the Next Generation's Healthy Relationship Curriculum Development Project with the Wellness Institute in Shelton, Washington. And Gordon is on the Board of the Native Wellness Institute.

I'd like to start and ask you to tell us briefly what the Native Wellness Institute does and how you work with

families in the Native American community?

**MS. JAMES:** We are a national nonprofit organization, all Native organization, that works with tribes and tribal communities across the United States and Canada. We serve all First Nation peoples. We primarily focus in five areas: healthy relationships and parenting, tribal leadership, youth and adult. We also focus in the areas of workplace wellness, and we also provide national conferencing and training throughout the country. We have tribal communities that will contact us with an issue or a need or a government to government issue and we will design programs to meet those needs. So with the Healthy Marriage Initiative, we applied for a grant through the Administration for Native Americans to provide a curriculum, to write a curriculum for Native communities.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Can you tell us a little bit about how the programs that the ANA has done, how they have been received in the Native communities and what you've done to enhance some of that work?

**MS. JAMES:** I'll share a little bit. Needless to say it was very challenging in the beginning because of our unique government to government relationship as nation to nation the Healthy Marriage Initiative was received as "Oh No! the government is going to try to tell us to get married!". In our culture that's not appropriate and was not received real well in the beginning. So we started educating and going out and talking with tribal communities, tribal governments and organizations and saying OK, we're not trying to get anybody married, but we are going to talk about healthy relationships. So that's the focus we took, about healthy relationships because in our culture what's appropriate is healthy relationships. And we look at it from a holistic perspective not specifically just a man and a woman or just a couple relationship or partnership, but very holistic—our relationship to all things. So for us once we got through those initial challenges then it was very well received and very much embraced that we could make that culturally relevant.

**MS. SHELLEY:** How did you have to adapt some of the goals of the Healthy Marriage Initiatives and messages specifically?

**MR. JAMES:** One of the ways that we had to consider how to approach a number of the tribal communities we work with as Pam alluded to, there was a significant hesitation anytime we talked about the Healthy Marriage Initiative because we have significant statistics in our tribal communities that demonstrate a lot of folks are just not interested in marriage. But a lot of people are interested in long term relationships, raising children and raising families. Our focus at the Native Wellness Institute is really how do we accomplish that, but how do we bring that wellness concept in so that we're raising healthy children in stable families. In that way we had to look at how do we bring many of those traditional elements, those cultural teachings that were helping to create resiliency in those communities over generations of time, how do we bring those lessons into a modern era so that we can blend the realities that people face in a modern world but still retain that traditional and cultural concept of who we are and where we come from.

**MS. JAMES:** So, basically, we took out the word "marriage".

**MS. SHELLEY:** What were some of the rewards that you found in your work as a result of those changes that you made to both the messages that were used, the words that were used, and your approach?

**MS. JAMES:** What was really exciting were some of the rewards and we're seeing this over the length of the curriculum in taking this curriculum around. What we keep hearing over and over again as we travel around the country working with many tribal people in communities is that finally we have something for Indians written by Indians that really embraces our culture, our cultural teachings. I think that was one of the most rewarding things, hear that there was something out there-- because there were so many curriculums out there that are very good curriculums but they just don't fit in Indian communities, they just don't fit with our people, and so this was really exciting to see this work happening.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Can you give us a couple of culturally specific examples of issues that you raise in your curriculum and how you do that?

**MS. JAMES:** In terms of cultural specificity, one of the things that we wanted to look at is when we talk about healthy relationships, there are so many elements that are entirely cross cultural. A healthy relationship is going to be a healthy relationship. It's really more the approach that we use, the lessons that we're going to teach, and the way that we're going to teach those things so that they can be appropriately received in the communities that we're working with.

One of the ways that we attempted to do that is again when we talk about a curriculum that's going to work in Indian country we're talking about over 560 different tribes, lots of different cultural histories. What we did was we brought in elders, we brought in cultural people, we brought in tribal elected officials from a number of communities clear across the nation and we gathered what are those teachings that are appropriate for their communities and that cross those geographical boundaries. What are those common principles about healthy relationships? How do we teach that in a culturally appropriate way for these many communities? Then we went through a lengthy field testing process where we would move into very geographically remote communities in Alaska, in Montana, in Rhode Island, in California, working specifically with tribal people, tribal couples, and seeing how could we teach people in their own communities to take the curriculum that we were developing and how will that work, how will that catch, how will they have a meaningful impact to the couples that they're working with.

After that lengthy process we realized we do have something that is going to cross those boundary lines, that's going to be appropriate for many of the tribal communities that we really need to bring these messages into.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Thank you. What I'd like to do is ask our panelists who represent and work with a range of communities from different backgrounds to say a little bit each briefly about how you're working with young people in your work specifically that we may not have already heard. I'd like to start with Gordon and Pam and then work our way across the panel.

**MS. JAMES:** Our curriculum in the work that we're doing really has no age boundary, so we work with a lot of young people and all age groups. In looking at this curriculum, this curriculum works in our communities in terms of our young people because we really look at it from a holistic approach that we can't work just with the individual, so we don't work just with the individual, we have to work with the extended family, we have to work with the grandmas and the grandpas and the aunties and uncles. So it's a holistic family community effort in educating our people.

**MR. JAMES:** In looking at the traditional way that this happened with the tribal community, if we go back to that old village concept, there would be elders in those villages who had the responsibility to make sure that you take the lessons that we've learned over generations of time and how do people have healthy relationships. Again, that's not just the couple relationship, but relationships throughout the community. What are those lessons that the elders intently passed down and what were the ways that they passed that down to the next generations? We want to capture that, reincorporate that, reinvigorate that within the tribal communities that we're targeting to work in.

**DR. LA HOZ:** Like I mentioned, we have about 3,000 or so students that we have served either in the high school or community groups such as the Boys and Girls Clubs or after school programs. It's surprising because in the high schools a lot of the groups are elective classes and we have quite a lot of participation and now increasingly more interest from the CPS, Chicago Public School System, to get more involved and so we actually have a little bit of an interesting dilemma of too much demand.

One of the fun things that we get to do is for example we're trying to engage the youth so we're having them participate in some of the media pieces that we're trying to put together. We're having them do an essay context and contacting the media part of the colleges, we're also in the colleges and having them help us with the media pieces because they need some kind of project to do so why don't they help us and it's a cost saving idea and also helps us be on target and get them involved in that process.

We have a lot of family components and events that we sponsor. We just had one and it was quite a success in spite of all the flooding that we had through Ike. But in that conference for example we had a track in Spanish, a track in English, a teen track, and a children's track and everybody was offering the same services. The local children's museum sponsored a children's program. So everybody had their own little track and they were taking classes on relationship enhancements. And although we had about 2,500 people register, we only had about a thousand attend because of the flooding that was happening in Chicago.

But we're trying to be in each community. We have this conference for example from communities so we have a little traveling conference to make sure that that community is actually the one that's benefiting from that. So we do this at a high school and the principal says to us thank you so much for coming here because we usually don't get these kinds of services. So we try to have a very professional kind of event that they otherwise would not have had. So we have those kinds of situations. And we also provide like I said ongoing programs for the youth.



**MS. SHELLEY:** Thank you.

**MS. MUHAMMAD:** I think one of the things that's very important is that we use music with our teens to help them get the message across about relationships. There's a Hip Hop artist Fabolous who has a song called "Make Me Better" and there's a line in the song where he says, I need Coretta Scott if I'm going to be King." We take these lyrics, print them out for the teens, have them talk about the lyrics. What does it mean to be a Coretta Scott? What does it mean to be King? And how is this significant? Because they sing these songs over and over again without really having a good understanding of what is they're singing about. So we use a lot of music, a lot of Hip Hop music, to really get across the message of what works and what doesn't work.

**DR. SLACK:** One of the things that I think is critical is that I go where to people are. So if there are a group of guys hanging out on the corner, I go out and hang out with them to find out what it is going on in their lives and I use Reframing, Reclaiming, and Renaming. I reframe what they're talking about. I help them to reclaim. I was so interested in what Gordon was saying about the rich heritage that many of these guys have no clue because they've gotten on the bus at this point and they don't recognize how important marriage was to our communities as my kids would say "back in the day". And help them to reframe what they see and help them to understand that we can reclaim our communities if we step up and be men. And here again another one of the issues is what they've seen about manhood is so distorted that I have to have discussions with them about what it is to be a real man and I use some of the 10 Rites of Passage information from Ron Johnson who made the distinction that most guys either use sex, violence, making money as their indicators of manhood. We try to reframe that and rename manhood and help them to understand that in order for our communities to be better, men have to take their rightful place. And the reality is there is no really good marriage without good healthy men and so we have to talk about that, what it means to have a Rite of Passage into manhood and to reclaim our communities.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Thank you. Thanks very much. Pam or Gordon?

**MR. JAMES:** No.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Go ahead. You're welcome to. Let me see if there are questions in the audience for our panel. Yes, sir? And if you could please identify yourself and speak up.

**MR. NELSON:** My name is Aaron Nelson. I'm with CLASP. I will direct this question at Rozario or I guess any of the other panelists as well. I want to know what's your program doing to address some of the material barriers that impact marriages particularly such as unemployment, incarceration, or limited education, things of that nature.

**DR. SLACK:** I recognize that there are a lot of not so obvious issues that keep people from getting married, but there are a lot of resources in our community whose job it is to eliminate or eradicate those barriers. So I do a lot of referring. I have a lot of people who I work with on a consistent basis and help to unpack for the guys some of the resources and help them to come out of the shadows and take advantage of some of the

literacy programs, some of the employment training programs. I actually have to sometimes take them by the hand to get them to those places. So I do it personally and I've got a lot of other guys who work with me to do that. But I use guys to do it because they have shunned a lot of work that women have done with them.

**MS. MUHAMMAD:** I think the other part is that this marriage cannot just be in isolation with everything else that goes on in people's lives. You can't just give people communication skills and think you're going to be fine when they don't have a job as you said, they're about to be evicted. It has to be a program that looks at the total person and what is going on in their life besides they may have to communicate better because everything else impacts everything else. So the holistic approach in looking at couples and looking at their family and looking at what's going on works better because marriage affects everything, relationships affect everything like everything else affects their relationship and their marriage as well.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Go ahead.

**MR. JAMES:** I was going to add on to the comment that it's important that we acknowledge that certainly those material problems are stressors to a relationship but they're not barriers to learning what a healthy relationship is and we can still teach that to people. Once we've created that foundation of understanding of how important the healthy relationship is, that it's the foundation for the family and for the community, then a couple can be working together to resolve those issues rather than a person feeling left alone.

**MS. JAMES:** And one of the things that we do within our communities is we start out with historical trauma and we look at the trauma aspect first because one of the things we find in our communities is we have traditionally would be what we call "shouy' and who'ah" (?) which means you are an orphan of identity. If you don't know who you are, you will attach yourself to another culture or to another identity and that's where we want to begin to bring back our people back to who they are as Indian people and what that means. Once we develop the identity and we look at that historical trauma and we look forward or how do we move forward from that historical trauma and oppression and assimilation and then just starting moving toward wellness and we start with that individual there, then moving to our couples, our families and our extended families and giving them that foundation to build those healthy relationships whether it's with their partner or anyone else or anything else in their lives.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Thank you. Yes, ma'am?

**MS. MITCHELL:** I'm Helen Mitchell from Danny K. Davis's office Ms. Muhammad as well as Mr. James, my question is could you talk about this whole nexus between domestic violence and fatherhood. In light of the fact that there has never really been a more comprehensive approach to addressing the issue of domestic violence, and more important, reciprocity and understanding issues of fatherhood and issues of domestic violence and taking into consideration the socioeconomic ills and woes that do affect the family unit?.

**MS. MUHAMMAD:** That's a very good point, to mention the whole issue of domestic violence. What we do

especially in the work that I do with my teens, I let them know especially the teen dads that your child is more likely to experience child abuse if you break up with this mom and they are now with someone else. If your child is now living with his mother or her mother and her boyfriend, your child is 50 times more likely to experience child abuse than if they are with you together.

The other things we talk about is that in terms of being able to manage conflict, in terms of being able to communicate better, all of these are reducers for domestic violence.

We try to help couples to understand that when you have a stable relationship, when you're in a position where you are considering marriage, that domestic violence is less likely to occur in a stable relationship than it is if you're just with this person today, that person tomorrow.

And we have domestic violence protocols that we utilize in our programs as well. Our main focus is to keep women and children safe. But we've had instances where the man has been the one that has been the victim of domestic violence as well. And so we make the point clear that our goal is to keep men, women, and children safe in relationships and also to help people know how to create a safe relationship as opposed to the relationships that they were used to growing up and seeing domestic violence.

We had a couple where the man was very transparent in saying he grew up seeing his father beat his mother and then go in the bedroom and they had (sexual) relations, so he thought that was the way to do it. So in his first marriage that's what he emulated. He would beat his wife and then they would go in the bedroom and have relations because that's all he grew up knowing that that's the way it happened. That was his first wife and that didn't last long! So he was in my program with a second wife and she was like, "No, that's not happening this time around!" And he was like "I had to learn a different way".

So for a lot of people it's learning a different way of handling crisis, handling conflict. We tell couples some conflict is not going to be resolved. Some conflict you can only manage or the conflict will manage you because if they keep trying to resolve this conflict, then that creates more conflict because the conflict is not going to be resolved. And then we let them know some things you're not going to come to an agreement on and it's just best to disagree and keep on moving than to try to constantly try to force somebody to see your point of view. But our goal is to have safe relationships.

**MR. JAMES:** One of the sad realities for many of our tribal communities, and a favorite phrase that Pam loves to share with some of the groups that we work with— too many of our tribal communities come from an experience that said the definition of love is "black eyes and hickies" and it was a norm for too many people that domestic violence was appropriate, was accepted. And part of the work that we're trying to accomplish through this curriculum and through the work of the Native Wellness Institute is to reclaim that concept of what the role of a man is in those relationships especially in terms of one of those roles as being a warrior, as a protector for the family and the community.

**DR. LA HOZ:** And I'll add to that the importance of that community concept. It just seems that often times

people are silenced in their homes, the situations that they're living in, they keep very much isolated and so that being part often of a group with other participants, (at least it's been our case when they continue to participate in the follow up groups) there is this accountability now with other participants that say, uh uh, that's not the way it is and that's very powerful in terms of activating change in their lives.

Also the preventative work that we're doing with the high school students, with the young people, the earlier that we can do that I think it's very important because we are providing them a way out because what they know, violence, is what they see every day and if we're able to provide them a different way, because it's usually it's just that they get stuck, they don't know how, and so we're providing them the how and if we can establish healthier patterns earlier on I think that that would be wonderful in transforming our communities.

**MS. JAMES:** And I just wanted to add that for us as Native people, we take our people back to those traditional teachings of this gift of life. Our traditional teachings teach us that to honor a woman and a child is the greatest gift, and that woman as a giver of life is to be honored and respected and to harm a child or a woman would be to insult life itself. So when we bring this teaching into what we called the last two or three generations our "lost generations" and that now we're coming full circle and we're bringing to our generations those traditional teachings that taught us how to live.

We have all of those resources and that information. It was just as we say it didn't die, we didn't lose our culture, it just was "paralyzed" for a period of time. And now that we're bringing back those traditional teachings, because one of the things that we've seen in the domestic violence realm so much in the last few generations is that when you have a group of people that have been oppressed for 500 years what do you get? You get oppression. Right? You've learned oppression well.

And so what happens for many of our people that were put into boarding schools and I myself can attest to that. I was a boarding school kid. When we were put into boarding schools you don't learn about healthy relationships. You don't learn about how to raise a family. So when you take a community and you put them into boarding schools, you separate them from all of their family and then all of a sudden they become young adults and you turn around and say go back to your reservation and live happily ever after. It doesn't quite work that way.

And as we start addressing those issues from that cultural perspective and those cultural teachings, it gives an avenue and an opportunity for our people to find who they are and then grow from there. And so we really try not to focus so much on the negative, but how do we move forward. What was the resiliency of our ancestors when we look at we've been here for 10,000 years, we will be here for more? How do we keep moving forward as indigenous people of this land? So when we start changing those thoughts and where we're moving has really been having a positive impact on our communities.

**DR. SLACK:** One quick point on that. One of the things that I try to do with men is help them to understand from the child's perspective what they're seeing is what they'll be. And I also talk to men about their com-

mitment as a young man to say--particularly if they came from a background where the father was not doing what they perceived he should have been doing-- that they made a promise that they would not replicate that behavior. But often they had not put themselves in a situation where they told themselves what they would do. So I help to put into them those thoughts and those attitudes that will help to save the village as Gordon was saying, to understand that we are the keepers of the village and that we have to war against forces that would hurt our community and to take some of that anger and anxiety and frustration and use it in fruitful ways.

**MS. SHELLEY:** We have one question that will be our last question.

**MS. THOMPSON:** Actually it's not a question. My name is Carole Thompson and I'm with the Annie E. Casey Foundation. I just want to applaud the answers that we have to that question from this panel because I think it shows how important that each of them takes the issue of domestic violence in the work that they do.

I also want to point out in the resource guide or the binder that you received there's a CD. It's a CD that was done by the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center that was prodded by a funder because the issue of domestic violence is critical. As we start this work, ACF has done a wonderful job of funding all these 100 programs that are working on domestic violence, but still many of those (healthy marriage) programs don't have adequate knowledge of how do deal with the issue of domestic violence in terms of their curriculums. If they heard this panel they would be much more educated. But this CD is in everyone's book and I encourage you to take it back to the office to look at the material, print it out, share, and contact Mary or Patrick and get more copies of it, because it's an excellent resource that discusses the issue of domestic violence and programming. Actually the second briefing that they held on this topic back in July was on domestic violence and healthy marriage..

**MS. SHELLEY:** Thank you. This looks like a burning, quick question. She's promising me it's burning!

**MS. WHITE:** Dorinda White, office of Congressman Diane Watts, and also she's Chairman of the Entertainment Industry Caucus. How do you think that the entertainment industry in general has been enrolled in putting forth images or roles of marriage, positive images of marriage or negative images of marriage, domestic violence and other issues that might be portrayed in the media? Have you felt that they've come forth and offered assistance or have they been hands off?

**MR. JAMES:** I have a really short, quick answer to that one. Considering that while other minority groups may worry that they are underrepresented in the media, that is vastly our problem for Native Americans.

**MS. JAMES:** We are not out there.

**MR. JAMES:** So when we look at the images positive or negative from within our communities, we look at it as that's everybody else, but that's not us. So we're not seeing those kinds of messages even in a positive light reflecting upon our communities.

**DR. LA HOZ:** We're making some inroads in terms of local media outreach, magazines, newspapers, radio, that are allowing us to have programs that are call in kinds of programs where we provide ongoing support for people and there's a flood of need for it. But in terms of messages that are happening more globally, the Latino community, the novellas, the soap operas, usually have a lot of messages that sometimes are not very helpful in a sense of leaning on destiny and waiting for that destiny to happen sometimes supports a passive stance instead of an active stance. Or sometimes the lyrics in songs are not really healthy. You mentioned you just need to listen to the radio and some of the pop music that we're listening to is not necessarily healthy trends for healthy marriages, but the opposite.

**MS. MUHAMMAD:** What's kind of interesting, I mentioned the Usher song "Love in the Club," but Usher was also on the cover of "Essence" magazine, the August issue, and in that article he talked about his marriage. I was just blown away when I read the article how he is so happy he got how marriage has changed his life and how he's a better man because he's married. I was like how many young people are reading this, are getting this message from him as opposed to the let's make love in the club message that they're getting from the song? They have a valuable role to play if we could just get them more involved and get them to give our appropriate messages.

**DR. SLACK:** I think if we insert ourselves in the lives of the young people and help them to interpret what's media and what's reality, and like what Nisa is saying, that most of the entertainers are two different people. They've got the one that's in the public eye and then they have the one that they really are. So I applaud people like Chris Rock who does some different things. He's got his notoriety, but he also has I love my wife, or I think I love my wife. I better love my wife or whatever it was. And then Tyler Perry who I think is doing an awesome job putting the marriage message out there. So we've got some people and if we can make those advocates' voices louder then I think we can change a lot of people into doing what I consider to be the right thing.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Doing the right thing. That's a good place to end.

**DR. SLACK:** That would be Spike Lee.

**MS. SHELLEY:** Thank you very much everyone for joining us for the session. Evaluations. As Patrick said, this is the ticket out of the room, to complete your evaluation. Thank you very much for your work.

(Whereupon, at 11:00 a.m., the PROCEEDING were adjourned.)

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#### CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings

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/s/Carleton J. Anderson, III

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In and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

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