



**national
healthy marriage
resource center**

March 2011 Webinar Transcript Questions and Answers

**Healthy Marriage Programs:
Opportunities to Partner with Courts**

March 31, 2011

1. *For Ann Bruce in Weld County, what aspects of your program do the court-referred youth seem to respond to most?*

Ann Bruce: I've seen them respond when we start talking about healthy relationships, where many of the youth have this idea that healthy relationships mean the partner texts them every few minutes to know where they are. They've been inundated with media like Twilight where they think it's adorable that Edward is watching Bella (program characters) sleep. And they glamorize that sort of stalker-type behavior into what makes a healthy relationship.

We start talking about that and really explain to them why that's not healthy and how that's a very controlling aspect of the relationship and ask them if that is really what they want. We start off with looking at what's healthy, what their healthy goals are, what they want in their life, and tie that into these controlling behaviors and even violent relationship behaviors that you often see with youth. And we ask them, is this really what's going to get you to where you want to be?

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

2. *Do you use a lot of media in the learning process or in a group setting with the youth or even couples in your program?*

Ann Bruce: We do. With *Love Notes* in particular we try to bring in more of the media and the music. We are also lucky that in our county we have a program we can refer kids to that [addresses] positive feminine and masculine roles --that really gets into the media. But we do touch in on it in our programs as much as the curriculum will allow.

3. *For Lynda Williams, how do parents respond when they are recommended to participate in the ANTHEM program?*

Lynda Williams: Initially they ask, "You want me to do a whole Saturday?" And that's where it's been really helpful to have a representative come and talk to them about the program and explain what the experience is going to be. They also provide them with lunch so that helps a little bit too.

A lot of times what happens is when one family has gone to the workshop, they come back and start talking to other families about it, and you don't hear the same worries.

We've had parents say they work on Saturdays and can't go. So we'll ask them if there is any other adult family member who might be able to take their child, although we think it would be really beneficial for them to come. And again it's useful to have the representative there to answer questions. Recently I had a dad who said that both he and his wife work, and there's no way they could attend on a particular Saturday. So we offered them another Saturday session, and lo and behold, they went to that.

So I think the really important thing is that connection parents make with that person who is going to be

their facilitator for that group. Initially they are upset about the time commitment, but then they go and they're saying, "Oh this is the best thing that I ever did."

4. *Here's a question for Lynda and Ann, and just tell me if you don't have the authority to answer this question. Do you think either the Dallas Juvenile Department or Weld County would be interested in and consider funding relationship education classes for juvenile offenders outside of the current grant funding from other sources?*

Lynda Williams: Actually, I think that ANTHEM Strong Families is currently doing something in the Juvenile Detention Center. I don't know exactly what they're doing because I'm not really connected to that part of the department. When you have a successful program and it's really helping the kids you serve, there might be some ways that they could do the funding, but it is always a challenge.

Ann Bruce: Our juvenile system would love to continue this program, and if we can find the funding that would be great. One of the things that we are very keen on here in Weld County is bringing all the players to the table and even though on the outside it may not seem to make sense to bring a certain person to the table, you never know what assets they can bring. Money is not always what's needed: sometimes it is facilitators, sometimes it's graphic artists. We work on trying to bring as many people to the table so that potential funding is greater, and the arguments for funding are much stronger.

5. *Are there other programs that you're aware of that judges refer couples or individuals to that would be similar to Healthy Marriage or Healthy Relationship programs?*

Alicia Davis: One of the most common orders that you'll find in a court order for almost any child or family case are for parenting classes. Listening to the descriptions of these other programs, I was just thinking about some of the parallels between them and parenting classes.

So I think it's a really natural fit. Because judges are so accustomed to ordering parenting classes, to make the parallel between parent classes and the relationship classes described today would help them see the need or the benefit.

6. *Everyone's busy, judges especially. Is there any way that a judge may sit in on a class, to become more familiar with the content of the course and the materials?*

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

My recommendation is to simply recognize up front that their time is really limited and that they are people who, by their training and background, respond well to paper documents, especially documents that are concise. This is why I would recommend communicating with busy judicial officers and court administrators through a half-page or one-page FAQ sheet that lists the benefits of the program and how they can utilize it. It should be something that's easy to produce and include your contact information.

I really do think that if more judicial officers were aware that these programs are available in their communities, more referrals would start to come. It starts developing as people get a better sense of what it is that these programs can do for the people coming before court.

Ann Bruce: Our programs are open to the community and most Healthy Marriage grant programs are open to the community. Sometimes you can suggest that the judges come to this class so they can see what they're recommending, but they can also come to the class for their own relationships. And I agree that the half-page FAQ sheets are great for getting information out to very, very busy people.

7. *I'm a certified family life educator who is part of a corporation but also has non-profit status with two churches. Should I present both statuses when speaking with the court? Obviously it'd probably depend on the specific court and relationships and the community, but is there any difference in doing outreach to the courts if one is non-profit or for-profit, faith-based or not faith-based?*

Ann Bruce: What really helped us with one of our faith-based agencies, Waypoint, was that they actually went to the members in their own church community to help with getting into some of the court programs.

We're in an interesting position as well. We are county government but we also partner with the University, a non-profit, and a faith-based agency. So we are able to fill whatever needs that our audience was looking for. My suggestion would be to know your audience, know some of their history and some of their background, their trigger points or their political platforms, so that you can talk to them in a way that they will be willing to hear you.

8. *Any closing comments or thoughts or key takeaways that any of the presenters would like to highlight or remind our participants about this subject?*

Alicia Davis: I would like to say again that I really appreciate being able to participate in this webinar because I think it's such a wonderful service to the community. For people coming before the court, by their own will, by the filing of a divorce, or because they've been the subject of a truancy petition or a delinquency or a child abuse and neglect petition, it's just such a tremendous service that you're providing. So thank you for that.

Lynda Williams: I would second that.

Ann Bruce: In thinking about families going through divorce and the dissolution of a marriage, it's really a great time to be bringing in Healthy Relationships. What I've found in our work is that when you go through the process of separating from your spouse, you may have children and you're expected to co-parent those children in a healthy manner. Co-parenting means communication and conflict resolution with the person you couldn't communicate and resolve conflict with well enough to stay married. So for the sake of that child, having them go through healthy relationship classes is huge. The benefits are huge for that child and for the adults that are going through it.

Please note: Participation in OFA grant funded Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood programs must be voluntary. Individuals cannot be mandated to a particular program however they may choose from a menu of program options.