



**national  
healthy marriage  
resource center**

*Strengthening Families, Communities, and a Nation – One Marriage at a Time*

## **“Retention: If Participants were Boomerangs...”**

**National Healthy Marriage Resource Center Webinar Training  
August 15, 2007 ♦ 12:30pm-2pm (EDT)**

### **Presenters**

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**[www.healthymarriageinfo.org](http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org)**

# Learning Objective

- Discuss ways that programs have effectively diagnosed retention challenges and strategized solutions (including soliciting participant feedback) to address them.
- Learn and share program specific strategies to document program participation as it relates to retention

# For Starters...

- In most programs, marriage education alone is not enough to encourage participants to return. Programs must create an environment where participants feel connected to staff and each other, like family. Add life, fun, and allowable elements to your programs that participants seek to ensure they not only return and complete, but grow from the connection with others.
- Your retention efforts are heavily dependent upon the strength and quality of your program offerings.
- Programs should include participant input (critical) when designing efforts and strategies to address participant retention.



# For Starters...

- Within the guidelines of your funding, be creative with respect to providing supports that address participant challenges to completing your program.

## **For Federal Healthy Marriage Grantees:**

- Be sure to talk with you Federal Project Officer to determine creative supports that can provide to address retention challenges/obstacles for participants.
- Retention is key to participants completing your program. Federal grantees providing marriage education services can only count someone as being served if they receive at least 8 hours of marriage education.



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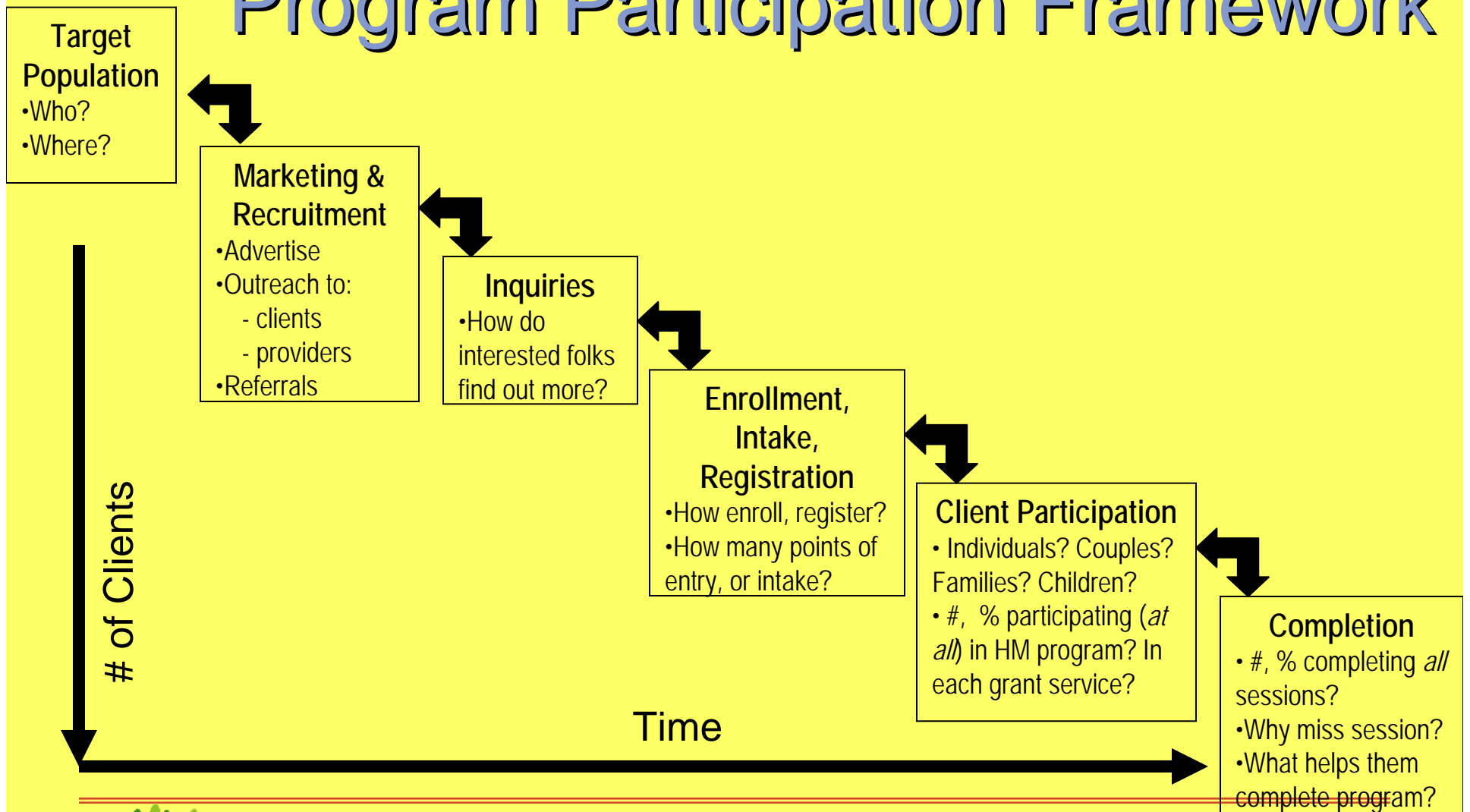
# Keeping and Retaining Participants

Now that you've got them, how do you keep them  
coming back?

Allison Hyra  
National Healthy Marriage Resource Center

[www.healthymarriageinfo.org](http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org)

# Program Participation Framework



# Retention

## What? Why? When?

- What is it?
  - Retention is about keeping clients in the program until completion
- Why is it important?
  - Spent a lot of time, energy, and resources to get them in the program
  - Getting full benefit and knowledge from the classes requires completing all the classes
- When does it occur?
  - After recruitment and enrollment, your clients are finally in the program
  - Begin from the first class and keep track of whether client attendance is spotty or declining or steady



# Strategies for Maximizing Retention

## 1) “The lower the barriers, the higher the retention”

- Identify and lower logistical barriers to participation
  - Time
    - Schedule classes at times that are convenient for the client and fits into their work and life schedule
    - Provide multiple options for clients (e.g., on various week nights, weekend classes)
  - Location
    - Hold classes in a place that is accessible by car and public transportation
    - Hold classes in facilities that are neutral (e.g., non-faith based as well as faith-based)
    - Make sure the place is flexible to allow clients to come early and stay later to talk and hang out with other clients
  - Transportation
    - Provide transportation if majority of clients do not have means to get to class (e.g., bus/cab vouchers, gas money, van pick-up)
  - Childcare and Food
    - Provide childcare on premises, perhaps concurrently provide a child class (e.g., character building, reading time, or tutoring)
    - Provide a meals since many clients may be coming straight from work, also this frees clients from cooking dinner



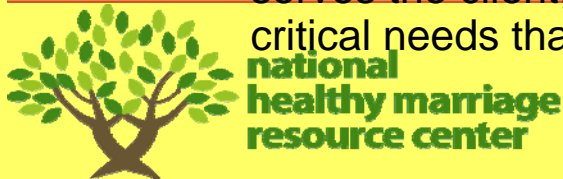
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# Strategies for Maximizing Retention

## 2) “High Touch and Support”

- Understand clients’ needs and expectations and strive to meet them
  - High Touch
    - Your clients are the reason the program exists
    - Be attuned to clients needs ranging from physical to emotional (e.g., seating, food restrictions if diabetic, new baby or adoptive parent status etc.)
    - Capture clients needs at enrollment, ask if there are things that may get in the way of their consistent participation or special needs to make classes more comfortable
  - Support
    - Success of your program depends on the participation and activity of your clients
    - Provide clients with safe and structured environment where they can learn
    - Provide and link clients to additional resources and services as they surface (e.g., GED training, TANF, employment training, housing etc.); this not only serves the client, but helps to retain them in the program by addressing critical needs that may disrupt participation



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# Strategies for Maximizing Retention

## 3) “Engaged and active clients are retained clients”

- Deliver the material in an engaging and dynamic manner
  - Remember that clients may have worked all day and are tired and would rather go home to unwind;
  - People learn in different ways so teach in different ways; they don't want to listen to a lecture for 3 hours
  - You want to make it worth their while to come to class so making the classroom fun, active, and comfortable for them will sway them to keep coming
  - Creating energized, empowering, and positive environment goes far in keeping clients coming back (e.g., incorporate ice breakers, fun activities—salsa dancing performance, group activities, picture taking, fun/date nights etc)
  - These interactive and non-didactic activities not only help to create group cohesion, but serve as different ways to learn
  - Hire and motivate facilitators to be engaging and interactive



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# Strategies for Maximizing Retention

## 4) “Looking backwards and forwards through the lens of continuous improvement”

- Take action to improve and modify existing practices or functions to maximize program functioning
  - Make adjustments based on what you’re learning and seeing
  - Get feedback from staff as well as clients
    - Don’t wait until the end of classes for client feedback; get a mid-course assessment
  - Assess retention numbers through the lens of continuous improvement
  - What do retention numbers say about:
    - How your program is functioning?
    - How you’re meeting your clients’ needs?
    - The quality of your classes, facilitators, other support services?
  - Based on the answers, what should you apply or modify for the next cohort to

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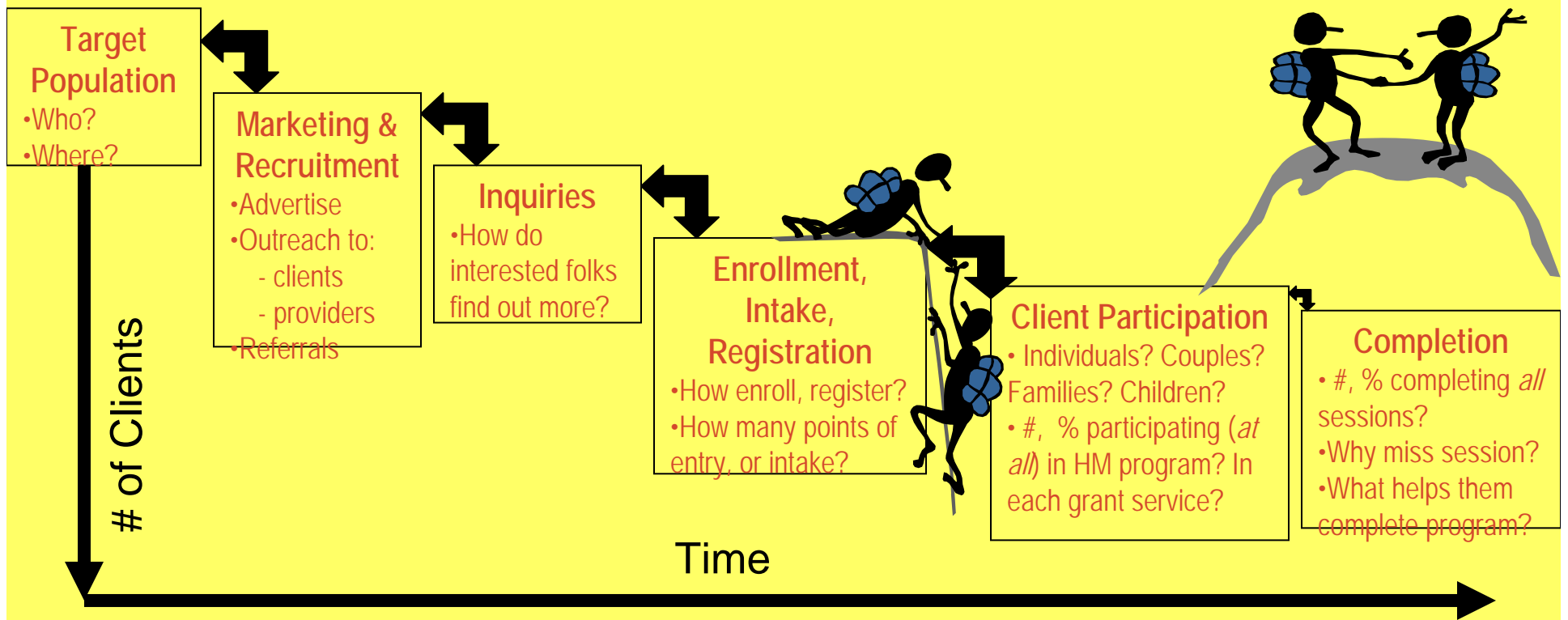
maximize retention?



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# Program Participation Framework

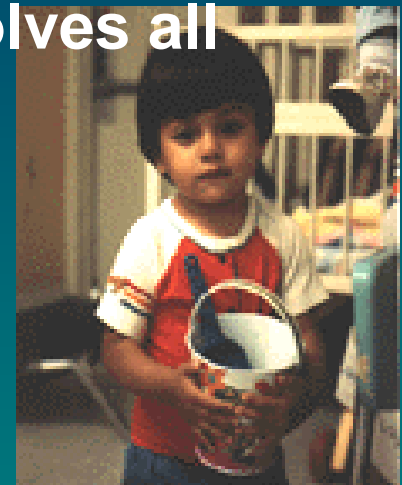
*(Post-implementation of retention strategies!)*



# ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL AVANCE HEALTHY MARRIAGE PROGRAM

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- The AVANCE Philosophy of service delivery
- A well-planned recruitment strategy that involves all staff
- On going retention efforts
- A comprehensive curriculum
- Acknowledgement of best practices
- A classroom environment conducive to learning
- Supportive services of meals, transportation, referrals and advocacy



# ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL AVANCE HEALTHY MARRIAGE EDUCATION PROJECT-cont.

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- Care for the children that integrates the objectives of the project
- Staff that is well trained and committed to the success of the couples
- A well planned orientation for couples at the beginning of the course
- Every staff person has a copy of the grant and understand their role in the success of the program
- AVANCE program staff are members of the local coalition focused on Healthy Marriages

# THE AVANCE PHILOSOPHY OF SERVICE DELIVERY

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- Philosophy of service
  - focus on the family and their children
  - comprehensive services
  - early intervention
  - community-based
  - culturally sensitive
  - preventive in nature
  - long-term
- **Respect** for each individual and for every couple-Respect is an action word
- **Welcoming behaviors practiced by every staff member**
- **Non-judgmental attitudes evident in every staff member**
- **Culturally and linguistically appropriate services and strategies**

# On-Going Retention Efforts

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- Retention starts with 1<sup>st</sup> encounter at recruitment phase
- Incentives are helpful
- Weekly reminders/calls when absent
- Flexible class hours: winter/summer work schedules
- Acknowledge barriers and work to correct/eliminate them
- Fit the program to couples not for the convenience of staff
- Provide quality care and experiences for their preschool children
- Provide fun and informative experiences for their adolescent children



# Incorporating Best Practices

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- Lessons learned from Houston Project 1 experience
- Journaling recommended
- Photos recommended
- Lessons learned from AVANCE's 34 years of serving families
- Lessons learned from HM research

# Classroom Environment Conducive to Learning

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- Comfortable seating
- Room decors changes to reflect theme of lessons
- Everyone's ideas are welcomed
- Facilitators are prepared and enjoy teaching the class
- Facilitators learn everyone's name

# SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

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- Meals for adults and children
- Transportation help
- Children's component-couples can bring all children with them to class
- Referrals are made when family has a need
- Staff advocate for the families
- Individual and Group Support
- Special Guests
- Recreational Activities
- Educational Field Trips
- Activities for the whole family

# CHILDREN'S COMPONENT INTEGRATED WITH THE CURRICULUM

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- Adult and children's staff engage in joint planning
- Objectives of each lesson of the "Parejas Unidas" curriculum is reflected in the children's activities

## Well-Trained Staff

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- Staff are active learners:
  - Conduct own search of the literature
  - Read books, journals, magazines and newspapers to keep abreast of new teaching strategies and approaches in Healthy Marriages Programs

# Facilitators Create the Climate

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- Positive and negative attitudes show through easily
- If you are comfortable with the material, the couples will be also
- Facilitators don't know it all and don't have to-however, they need to know where to go for answers
- Get to know the couples, greet them by name
- Get to know their couple profile
- Avoid judgments of the couples' comments or behaviors
- Sharing examples from your own couple relationships is helpful

# Facilitators Respond to the Couples' Needs

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- Many couples will have needs related and non-related to the relationship
- AVANCE staff responds and the Facilitator takes the lead
- AVANCE staff follow-through to make sure they receive the service of help needed

# Participants Tell Us:

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Participants were asked what types of incentives would keep them coming back, and these were their responses:

- Interesting and motivational topics
- The quality of the program
- An understanding instructor with a good attitude
- Extra help such as counseling
- A relaxing environment
- Being able to learn from others
- Assurance of confidentiality
- Learning new ways to solve problems
- Awards
- Retreats
- Raffles



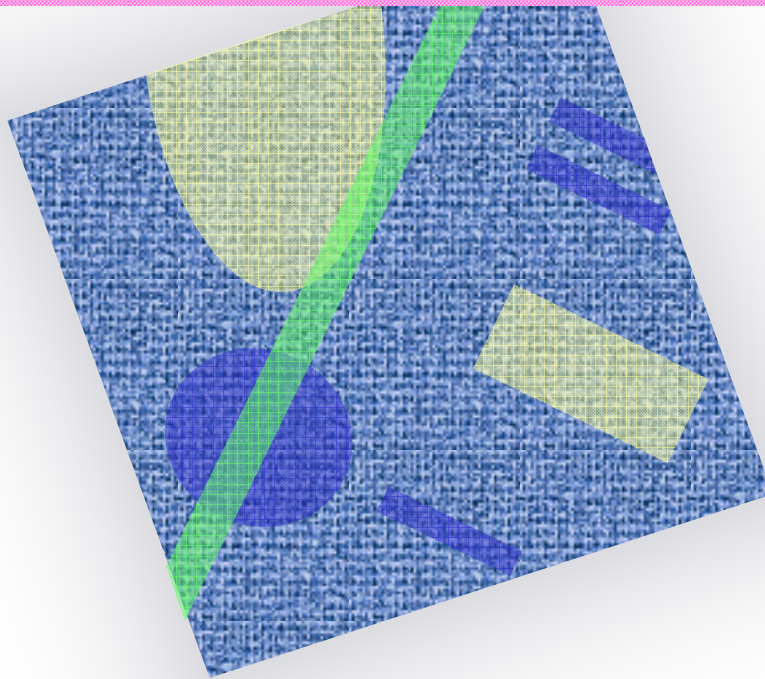
# Ways Attendance and Completion are Calculated

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- A data-entry clerk assigned to the program collects attendance on a weekly basis
- A data management report is submitted on a monthly basis for evaluations and attendance records
- Percentage of attendance are calculated and use for completion of program and graduation
- A total of 12 lessons (75%) need to be completed in order for participants to graduate

# FUTURE

Families United Through Understanding Relationships and Empowerment



How the Chicago Healthy Marriage Initiative Keeps Couples Coming Back for More



## **If You Build It Well, They Will Come Back!**

- ◆ Over 50 percent of participants had perfect attendance all 8 weeks
- ◆ No participant missed more than two sessions
- ◆ Drop outs never exceeded 30%
- ◆ Six couples married after completing the program



## What Keeps Them Coming Back

- ◆ Dynamic facilitators who “walk the walk”
- ◆ Interesting and relevant information and exercises...and homework, too!
- ◆ Empathetic case management
- ◆ On site childcare and meals for everyone
- ◆ Goody Bags!
- ◆ The Las Vegas Syndrome

# Ceremonies & Celebrations



## Who Comes?

- ◆ Unmarried couples living together
- ◆ Unmarried couples living apart
- ◆ Married couples
- ◆ Engaged couples
- ◆ Happy couples
- ◆ Concerned couples



## Who Comes?

- ◆ Expectant couples
- ◆ Young Couples (age 18)
- ◆ Mature couples (mid-50s and up!)
- ◆ Couples with children in common
- ◆ Couples with children outside the relationship
- ◆ Couples with newborns

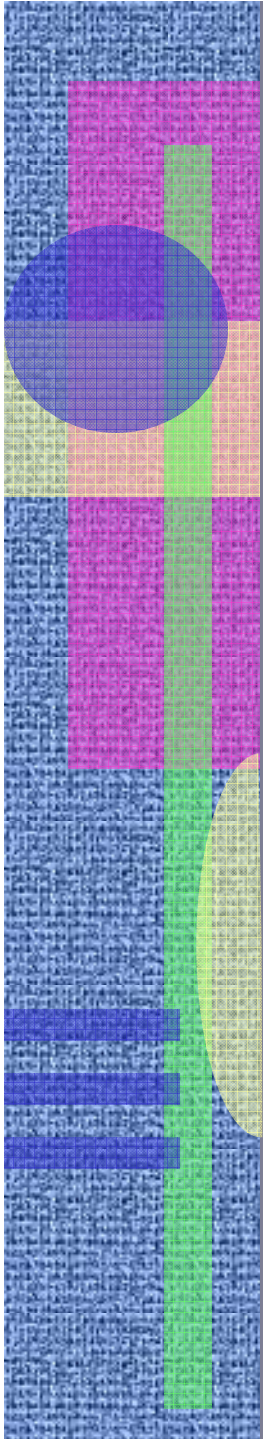




# TRACKING & FOLLOW UP

- ◆ Sign-in sheets
- ◆ Surveys
- ◆ Catholic Charities Case Management Tracking Program
  - ◆ Tracks all services as well as workshop attendance
- ◆ Follow up phone calls, appointments, letters





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