

## VII. FORMATION AND MAINTENANCE OF MARRIED TWO-PARENT FAMILIES

### The Importance of Married Two-Parent Families

Among the purposes of TANF, the creation and maintenance of two-parent families, plays an important role in the advancement of child well-being, reduction of poverty, and health of communities. Mounting evidence from meta-analyses<sup>1</sup> and literature reviews<sup>2</sup> indicates that children raised in married two-parent families fare better, on average, than children raised in other family types. Specifically, on average, children raised by parents in healthy marriages are less likely than those of other family forms to fail at school, suffer an emotional or behavioral problem requiring psychiatric treatment, be victims of child abuse and neglect, become pregnant as teenagers, exhibit illegal behavior, use illicit drugs, smoke cigarettes, abuse alcohol, engage in early and promiscuous sexual activity, grow up in poverty, or attempt suicide. Children raised by parents in healthy marriages are also, on average, more likely to have a higher sense of self-esteem, form healthy marriages when they marry, attend college, and be physically healthier (See Waite & Gallagher, 2000, for a review<sup>3</sup>).

As States and counties focus on sustainable employment as the essential element in poverty reduction, it is critical to note that research has shown that stable marriages are associated with more stable employment and higher wages. For example, a 2003 U.S. Census Bureau report shows that married couple households are stronger economically than non-married households.<sup>4</sup> The median income of married households in 2003 was \$62,405, compared with \$43,318 for all households, \$41,959 for male-headed households with no wife, and \$29,307 for female-headed households with no husband. The median income for non-family households, which measures any person living alone, with a roommate, or with a cohabitating partner, is only \$25,741. The poverty statistics show a similar pattern. In 2006, only 4.9 percent of married households live below the poverty level, compared with 9.8 percent of all households, 13.2 percent of male-headed households with no wife, and 28.3 percent of female-headed households with no husband.

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<sup>1</sup> Amato, P.R. (2001). Children of divorce in the 1990s: An update of the Amato and Keith (1991) meta-analysis. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15, 355-370.

<sup>2</sup> Milardo, R.D. (Ed.) (2000). *The decade in review*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62(4); Waite, L.J. & Gallagher, M. (2000). *The Case for Marriage*. New York: Doubleday; Wilcox, W.B., Doherty, W.J., Fisher, H. et al. (2005). *Why Marriage Matters*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. New York: The Institute for American Values.

<sup>3</sup> Waite, L.J., & Gallagher, M. (2000). *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially*. New York, NY: Broadway Books.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2003). *Table 4, Status of Families, by Type of Family, Presence of Related Children, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959 to 2002*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce.

The purpose of healthy marriage education programs is to increase the percentage of people in healthy marriages and, especially, the percentage of children being raised by parents in a healthy marriage. The objective is not for people to form any kind of marriage, but for those who choose marriage for themselves to form and sustain a healthy marriage. The heart of the Healthy Marriage Initiative is to help people; to provide access – to those who want it – to activities that build relationship skills and knowledge that can help them form and sustain a healthy marriage.

### **Fostering the Formation and Maintenance of Married Two-Parent Families**

As part of its ongoing efforts to alleviate poverty and foster economic self-sufficiency, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) recognizes the power of healthy, two-parent married families to promote these objectives. The Promoting Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage Education grantee demonstration programs are part of this larger commitment.

#### *Program Announcement and Competitive Grant Process*

In May 2006, the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Family Assistance (OFA) announced the availability of funds for both Healthy Marriage Demonstration and Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grants. In issuing these grants, ACF sought to identify and support innovative approaches to delivering healthy marriage activities and services, promote responsible parenting and foster economic stability. While both grants possessed unique program purposes and priority areas, ACF also recognized that healthy marriages and responsible fatherhood are closely linked and mutually supportive.

Under the Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grant, ACF sought to fund healthy marriage education and enrichment activities and public awareness and education campaigns that promote the benefits and elements of healthy marriage. Teen programs that explore positive relationship models and that teach the core skills necessary for healthy marriages were also eligible for ACF support. Interested applicants were asked to provide in detail the scope, audience, and evaluation approach of their proposed service delivery project, and indicate if it would be replicable in other contexts. ACF was especially interested in projects that would produce transferable tools and lessons learned that could be implemented by other healthy marriage organizations. The scope for proposed healthy marriage projects could be broad and comprehensive or narrow and targeted to specific populations. Organizations that demonstrated previous experience delivering skills-based marriage education services received bonus points for their application. For example, projects areas ACF expressed interest in included: divorce reduction programs that teach relationship skills, education in high schools on the value of marriage, and pre-marital education and marriage skills training for engaged couples. Grants were offered for five-year projects with a maximum support level of \$5,000,000 per year.

In making funds available for Responsible Fatherhood Grants, ACF looked to support programs that support healthy marriage activities, promote responsible parenting, foster economic stability, and help fathers remove barriers to reaching these objectives. As with the healthy marriage grants, ACF sought Responsible Fatherhood Grants that were innovative, provided transferable promising practices and targeted either a broad or specific population. Some of the potential target populations ACF indicated preference for included married fathers, single or unmarried

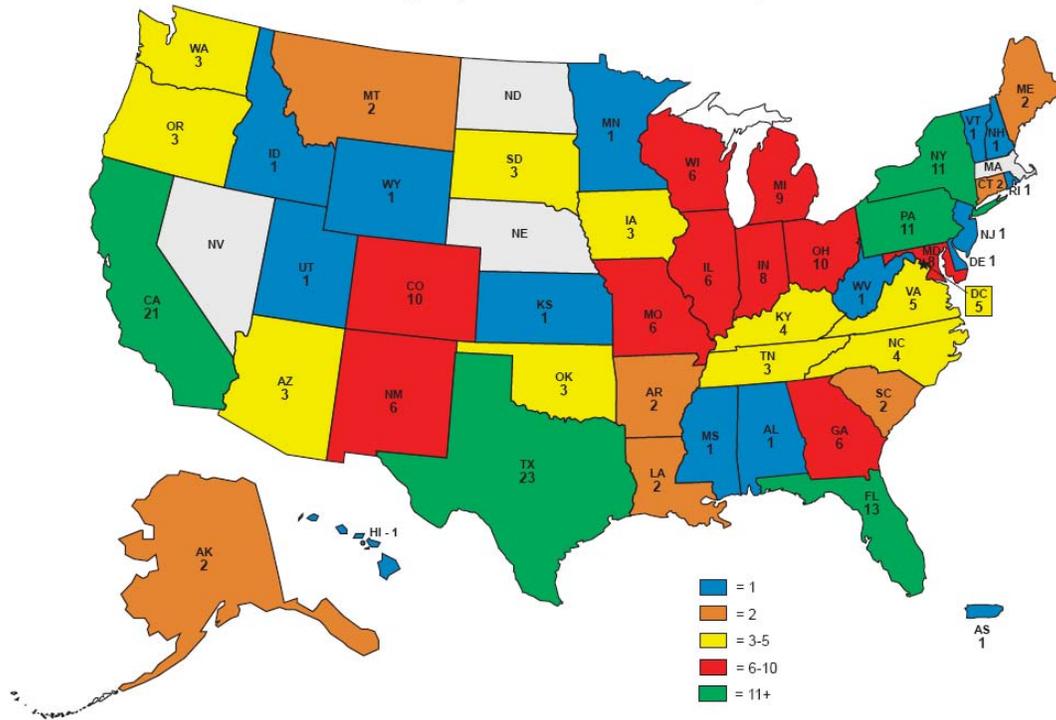
fathers, young or teenage fathers, and new fathers. Organizations also were highly encouraged to submit proposals that were designed to work with fathers of children with disabilities. Proposals were asked to include thorough project descriptions, plans for marketing and outreach, partnership plans and descriptions of any curricula organizations intended to use. Examples provided by ACF of potential projects included: developing effective programs for incarcerated fathers; developing culturally-competent programs for minorities around fatherhood; and helping fathers improve their economic status by providing activities such as job search, job training, and subsidized employment. Grants were offered for five-year projects with a maximum funding ceiling of \$1,000,000 per year.

Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grants were open to all levels of State governments, public institutions of education, Native American Tribal organizations, profit and non-profit organizations, small businesses, private institutions of higher education and faith-based groups. Applicants for either grant also were required to make themselves available to ACF evaluations, attend entrance and annual peer meetings and partner with on-site ACF sponsored technical assistance personnel. Approximately 1,650 marriage and fatherhood applications were received and 226 total grants (126 healthy marriage; 100 responsible fatherhood) were awarded.

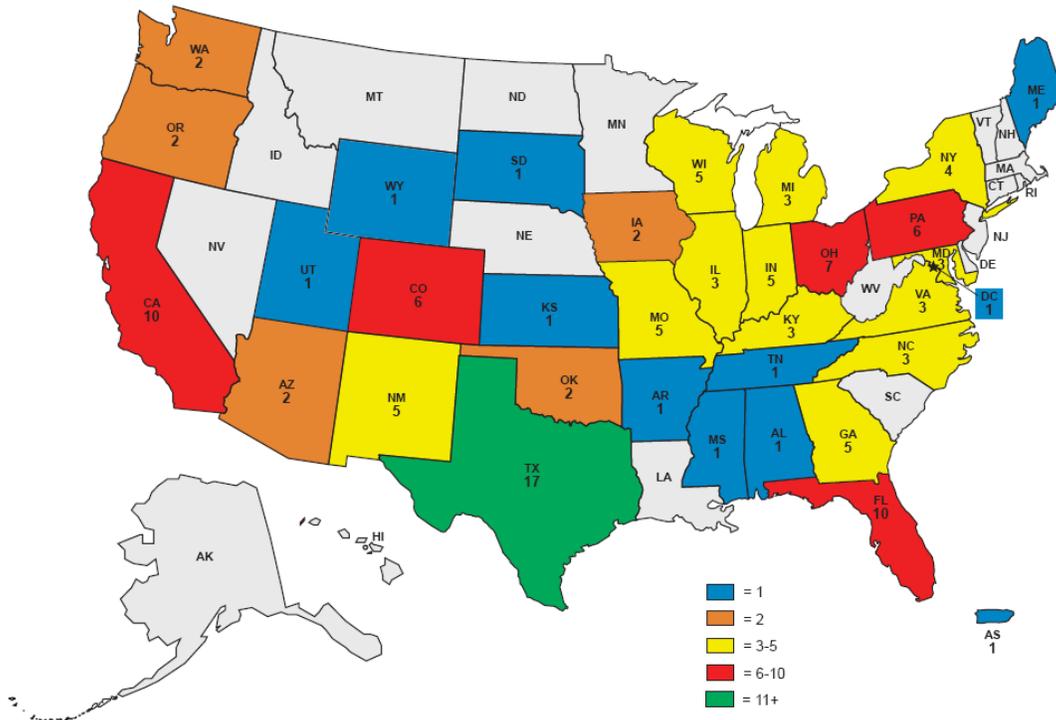
#### *Geographic Representation of Grantees*

As a result of the competitive process, OFA has funded grants across the country. Figures A, B, and C illustrate the geographic dispersion of the grantees.

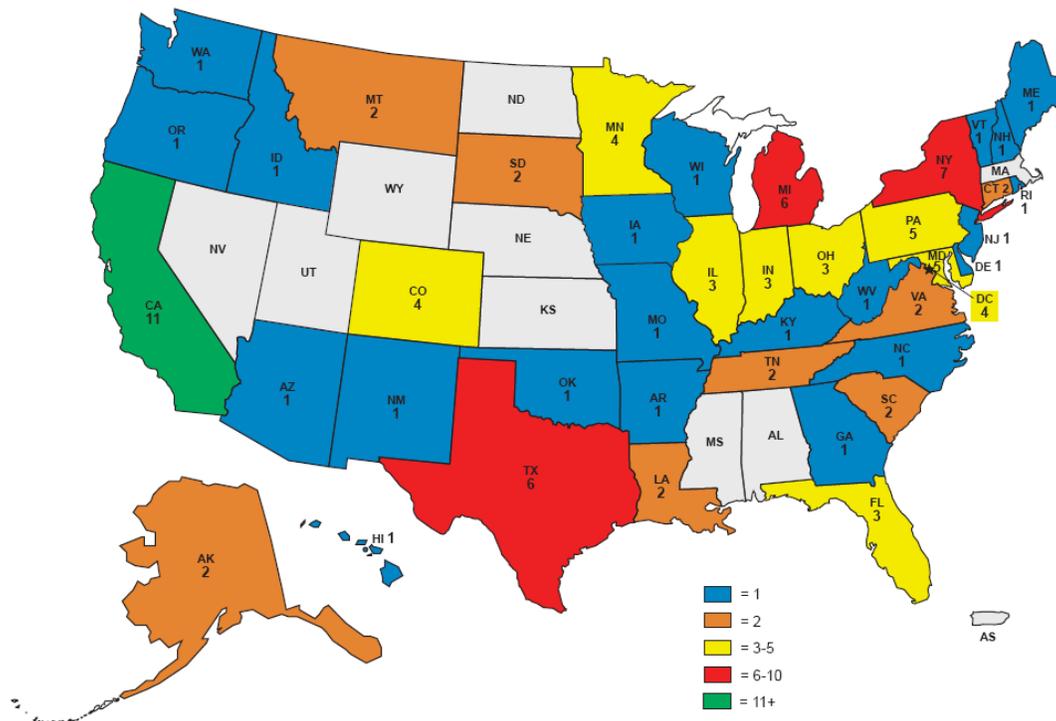
**Figure A**  
**Healthy Marriage Education and Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantees**



**Figure B**  
**Healthy Marriage Grantees**



**Figure C**  
**Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantees**



This geographic dispersion allows grantees to test Promoting Healthy Marriage Education and Responsible Fatherhood programs with a wide-variety of audiences. This variability will provide important insight about what works in these demonstrations and also gives strategic insight into appropriate next steps for these types of programs.

### **OFA Healthy Marriage Education Grantees**

While research has clearly illustrated the importance of healthy marriage to child well-being, as of 2000 the rate of anticipated divorce remained at about 50 percent of marriages<sup>5</sup>, half of all children could expect to live some time with a single parent<sup>6</sup>, and one third of all births were to unmarried women.<sup>7</sup> In the face of these trends, however, research has also identified predictors of marital distress and divorce, many of which—such as destructive communication patterns and ineffective conflict resolution skills—can be addressed by healthy marriage education programs. Emerging research suggests that marriage education can be effective, with studies showing short-

<sup>5</sup> Kreider, R. & Fields, J. (2002). Number, timing and duration of marriages and divorces: 1996. Current Populations Reports, Feb 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Haveman, R.H. & Wolfe, B.L. (1994). Succeeding Generations: On the Effects of Investments in Children. New York: Russell Sage.

<sup>7</sup> America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2005.  
<http://childstats.gov/americanchildren/pop7.asp>

term gains in interpersonal skills and relationship quality among premarital couples,<sup>8</sup> and some evidence suggesting improved communication and a lower likelihood of divorce five years later among married couples.<sup>9</sup>

### About the OFA Healthy Marriage Education Grantees

This convergence of science and socio-political forces around strengthening marriage resulted, in 2002, in the ACF Healthy Marriage Initiative aimed at “help[ing] couples, who have chosen marriage for themselves, gain greater access to marriage education services, on a voluntary basis, where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage.” Since then, OFA has funded efforts to develop, implement, evaluate, and disseminate information on healthy marriage programs and community-wide healthy marriage initiatives.

### Allowable Activities of Healthy Marriage Education Grantees

Under the Healthy Marriage Education Grants program, OFA sought to fund a wide range of programs that used innovative and effective projects to target diverse sets of stakeholders. Listed below is a description of the eight priority areas that received grant awards. To qualify for these grants, prospective grantees were asked to develop and implement projects that incorporated one or more of the following eight allowable activities:

1. Public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage and the skills need to increase marital stability and health.
2. Education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting.
3. Marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills programs that may include parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution, and job and career advancement for non-married pregnant women and non-married expectant fathers.
4. Pre-marital education and marriage skills training for engaged couples and for couples or persons interested in marriage.
5. Marriage enhancement and marriage skills training programs for married couples.
6. Divorce reduction programs that teach relationship skills.
7. Marriage mentoring program, which use married couples as role models and mentors in at-risk communities.
8. Programs to reduce the disincentives to marriage in means-tested aid programs if offered in conjunction with any of the other seven activities.

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<sup>8</sup> Carroll, J.S. & Doherty, W.J. (2003). Evaluating the effectiveness of premarital prevention programs: A meta-analytic review of outcome research. *Family Relations*, 52(2): 105-118.

<sup>9</sup> Markman, H.J., Floyd, F., Stanley, S. & Storaasli, R. (1988). The prevention of marital distress: A longitudinal investigation. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 56, 210-217.

The eight priority areas within the Healthy Marriage Grants program are:

1. Community Healthy Marriage Grants to Implement Multiple Allowable Activities, Level 1

Under this priority area, grants were awarded to organizations to implement five or more of the eight allowable activities simultaneously to a broad audience. Funding was awarded between \$1,500,000 and \$5,000,000 annually to 6 organizations.

2. Community Healthy Marriage Grants to Implement Multiple Allowable Activities, Level 2

Under this priority area, grants were awarded to organizations to implement five or more of the eight allowable activities simultaneously to a broad audience. Funding was awarded between \$900,000 and \$1,100,000 annually to 15 organizations.

3. Community Healthy Marriage Grants to Implement Multiple Allowable Activities, Level 3

Under this priority area, grants were awarded to organizations to implement five or more of the eight allowable activities simultaneously to a broad audience. Funding was awarded between \$450,000 and \$550,000 annually to 15 organizations.

4. Healthy Marriage Grants to Serve Low-Income Married Couples, Level 1

Under this priority area, grants were awarded to organizations to implement one allowable activity to low-income married couples (Allowable Activity #5). Funding was awarded between \$450,000 and \$550,000 annually to 9 organizations.

5. Healthy Marriage Grants to Serve Low-Income Married Couples, Level 2

Under this priority area, grants were awarded to organizations to implement one allowable activity to low-income married couples (Allowable Activity #5). Funding was awarded between \$225,000 and \$275,000 annually to 13 organizations.

6. Healthy Marriage Grants to Serve Low-Income Unwed Expectant or New Parents, Level 1

Under this priority area, grants were awarded to organizations to implement one allowable activity to low-income, unwed, expectant, or new parents (Allowable Activity #3). Funding was awarded between \$900,000 and \$1,100,000 annually to 3 organizations.

7. Healthy Marriage Grants to Serve Low-Income Unwed Expectant or New Parents, Level 2

Under this priority area, grants were awarded to organizations to implement one allowable activity to low-income, unwed, expectant, or new parents (Allowable

Activity #3). Funding was awarded between \$450,000 and \$550,000 annually to 20 organizations.

8. Healthy Marriage Grants to Implement any Allowable Activity

Under this priority area, grants were awarded to organizations to implement one or two of the eight allowable activities, each activity to a particular primary audience. Funding was awarded between \$450,000 and \$550,000 annually to 44 organizations.

Appendix Table 7:1 illustrates the activities that each Healthy Marriage Education grantee is engaged in providing.

### **OFA Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantees**

Research literature supports the finding that a loving and nurturing father improves outcomes for children, families, and communities. Recent research results show that fathers who live with their children are more likely to have a close, enduring relationship with their children. Other results show that children with involved, loving fathers are significantly more likely to do well in school, have healthy self-esteem, exhibit empathy and pro-social behavior, and avoid high-risk behaviors including drug use, truancy, and criminal activity. Research also indicates that children raised in homes with their fathers exhibit better developmental outcomes from an early age, and that active fathers improve child performance in verbal performance, problem solving, and adaptation to new social situations.

To contextualize the fatherhood research, much of this work has focused on father absence, which may be linked to demographic changes within families in the United States, with some of these shifts going as far back as the effects of World War II on the family unit; but since the 1970s, father absence has been more powerfully felt and recognized as an important phenomenon by researchers. Thus, the issues of father absence, as well as father presence, have been acknowledged as significant factors in family and child development for some time. Since the late 1980s, much of the interest in father absence has been replaced by a focus on father-specific parenting roles, relations, and involvement. Looking at how children fare with their fathers actively involved in their lives, whether or not their parents have chosen to marry, has become an important lens for researchers to study. Characteristics, such as nurturance, have emerged as key indicators of the effects of fathers' involvement in their children's lives in research studies.

Fathers have an important role in supporting their children to grow into healthy and contributing adults. By supporting local grantees that are strengthening father involvement over the last few years, this program ultimately seeks to strengthen positive outcomes for children.

#### **About the OFA Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantees**

With research and on the ground experience confirming the importance of fathers, ACF formed the Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Initiative as a result of the President's "A Blueprint For New Beginnings: Statement on Responsible Fatherhood," delivered on February 28, 2001. As

stated by the President, “the presence of two committed, involved parents contributes directly to better school performance, reduced substance abuse, less crime and delinquency, fewer emotional and other behavioral problems, less risk of abuse or neglect, and lower risk of teen suicide. The research is clear: Fathers factor significantly in the lives of their children. There is simply no substitute for the love, involvement, and commitment of a responsible father.”<sup>10</sup>

The demonstration grants funded as part of the Promoting Responsible Fatherhood initiative recognize the importance of responsible, present, and engaged fathers in the well-being of their children. Because of the research of the importance of fathers in their children’s lives, OFA has funded efforts to develop, implement, evaluate, and disseminate information on programs that promote responsible fatherhood and community-wide initiatives that underscore the importance of fathers taking their fatherhood seriously. The grantees range from small, locally-based non-profits and community and faith-based organizations to larger organizations. All of them serve specific target populations with tools to become stronger and better fathers to their children. The grantees’ activities focus on one or more of the following authorized activity areas: Healthy Marriage, Economic Stability, or Responsible Parenting.

#### *Allowable Activities of Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantees*

The fatherhood grant program funded a number of efforts, ranging from small to large, across a variety of diverse communities. Listed below is a description of the five priority areas that received grant awards. To qualify for these grants, prospective grantees were asked to develop and implement projects that supported any of the following three authorized activity areas: Healthy Marriage, Responsible Parenting, and Economic Stability.

1. Responsible Fatherhood Multiple Activity Grants, Level 1

Under this priority area, grants were awarded to organizations to implement two or more of the three authorized activity areas as listed above. The maximum funding level was up to \$1,000,000 each for up to 5 grants.

2. Responsible Fatherhood Multiple Activity Grants, Level 2

Under this priority area, grants were awarded to organizations to implement two or more of the three authorized activity areas as listed above. The maximum funding level was up to \$500,000 each for up to 15 grants.

3. Responsible Fatherhood Single Activity Grants, Level 1

Under this priority area, grants were awarded to organizations to implement any one of the three authorized activity areas. The maximum funding level was up to \$250,000 each for up to 52 grants.

4. Responsible Fatherhood Single Activity Grants, Level 2

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<sup>10</sup> A Blueprint for New Beginnings: A Responsible Budget for America’s Priorities. February 28, 2001.

Under this priority area, grants were awarded to organizations to implement any one of the three authorized activity areas. The maximum funding level was up to \$500,000 each for up to 7 grants.

5. Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated Fathers and their Partners

Under this priority area, grants were awarded to organizations to implement any of the three authorized activity areas. The maximum funding level was up to \$500,000 each for up to 15 grants.

Appendix Table 7:2 illustrates the activities that each OFA Responsible Fatherhood grantee is engaged in providing.

### **OFA Field Enrichment Activities**

In addition to the Promoting Healthy Marriage Education and Responsible Fatherhood grants discussed above, OFA has also provided three field enrichment resources designed to assist demonstration grantees in operating their grants and improving services to targeted customers. These field enrichment activities include the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, the National Responsible Fatherhood Capacity Building Initiative, and the Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Community Access Program. Each of these is discussed below.

#### *The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center*

In order to carry out ACF's mission of assisting States and communities promote and support healthy marriages for those who choose them, the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) provides a wealth of information for policymakers, State and community stakeholders, and the public at large. The NHMRC seeks to effectively disseminate information by improving practice through research and education, building and sustaining the capacity of the field, and fostering coalitions and partnerships. The NHMRC supports the field – specifically, ACF-funded grantees – through proven technical assistance strategies and methodologies. By putting research into practice, the NHMRC strengthens States and communities, as well as the overall field. Further, the NHMRC highlights marriage preparation, strategies for strengthening marriages and promoting healthy relationships, all of which are useful for the field and for the public at large.

The NHMRC Website, located at [www.healthymarriageinfo.org](http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org), serves as a comprehensive clearinghouse for information about healthy marriage, as well as targeted resources and interactive features that support ACF-funded grantees, including an online Community of Practice, Technical Assistance, and a Healthy Marriage Online Library. The NHMRC Web site also provides essential information for other audiences interested in marriage issues. The information on the site is organized by special area or resources, which are listed down the left hand side of the Web site. Each section has news, library resources, and subject-specific directives relevant to that topic or audience.

The NHMRC also sends weekly email updates to stakeholders announcing information that has been added to the Web site, including updates to topics and tools, news, and new publications available via the online library search. The NHMRC provides technical assistance (TA) specifically to serve OFA-funded responsible fatherhood grantees. Various technical assistance methodologies are available from the NHMRC, depending on the specific needs of the grantee. Types of TA delivered include capacity-building workshops, community mobilization models, coalition building meetings, webinars (is a seminar-type presentation provided over the web), moderated teleconferences, site visits, best practice summaries/compendium, peer exchanges, and learning opportunities through the online Community of Practice.

### *The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse*

The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC) is charged with carrying out ACF's mission of assisting States and communities to promote and support responsible fatherhood and healthy marriages. The NRFC seeks to improve practice through research and education, building and sustaining the capacity of the field, fostering coalitions and partnerships, and effectively disseminating information. The NRFC supports the field – specifically, ACF-funded grantees – through proven technical assistance strategies and methodologies. The NRFC also includes the promotion and distribution of a national media campaign to elevate public concerns surrounding father absence and offers strategies to strengthen responsible fatherhood.

The NRFC website, located at [www.fatherhood.gov](http://www.fatherhood.gov), provides the central access point for print and electronic publications on fatherhood and healthy marriage, as well as targeted resources and interactive features that support ACF-funded grantees, including an online Community of Practice, Technical Assistance, and a Fatherhood Online Library. The NRFC website also provides essential information for other audiences interested in fatherhood issues. The information on the site is organized by special area or hot topic, which are listed down the left hand side of the web site. Each section has news, library resources, and subject-specific directives relevant to that topic or audience. The NRFC also sends weekly email updates to stakeholders announcing information that has been added to the web site, including updates to topics and tools, news, and new publications available via the online library search.

The NRFC provides technical assistance specifically to serve OFA-funded responsible fatherhood grantees. Various technical assistance methodologies are available from the NRFC, depending on the specific needs of the grantee. Types of TA delivered include capacity-building workshops, community mobilization models, coalition building meetings, moderated teleconferences, site visits, best practice summaries/compendium, peer exchanges, and learning opportunities through the online Community of Practice.

### *The National Responsible Fatherhood Capacity Building Initiative*

OFA has invested in the creation and management of the National Responsible Fatherhood Capacity-Building Initiative (NRFCBI). ACF awarded funds to National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), an experienced national organization, to deliver organizational capacity building services to community-based organizations focusing on empowering lives, fostering families and contributing to community well-being. The NRFCBI will identify and provide assistance to

local community-based fatherhood organizations to expand their programs in four critical areas including: (1) leadership development, (2) organizational development, (3) program development, and (4) community engagement. These activities are expected to increase an organization's sustainability and effectiveness, enhance its ability to provide responsible fatherhood services, reach underserved and fragile populations, and create collaborations to better serve those most in need. Specifically, the team will: (1) identify and perform needs assessments for local community organizations to expand organizational capacity, (2) provide training and technical assistance to build the capacity of local fatherhood programs, and (3) support the development of an infrastructure capable of building and expanding new and existing programs. NRFCBI will deliver on-site training and technical assistance in areas including organizational, professional, program and fund development.

### *Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Community Access Program*

Finally, OFA has invested in further promoting responsible fatherhood by creating the Fatherhood Community Access (FCA) Program. The FCA's purpose is to promote responsible fatherhood by funding programs that support healthy marriage activities, promote responsible parenting, and foster economic stability. Different from the other programs, the FCA focuses on awarding grants to State agencies or other large organizations that have the capacity to ensure the delivery of services by developing and supporting faith-based and community organizations that promote responsible fatherhood at the local community level. These organizations serve as the lead for a network of faith-based and community organizations, who formally work together to coordinate the development and implementation of services at the grass-roots level. Furthermore, the lead organization provides technical and financial support through a collaborative approach with grass roots organizations and the Federal government, to support the development of a fatherhood service delivery network capable of expanding new and existing programs and services at the local level. Each FCA grantee coordinates with local organizations to ensure the delivery of services that help fathers overcome obstacles and barriers that often prohibit them from being effective and nurturing parents. While the primary goal of the initiative is to promote responsible fatherhood in all of its various forms, an essential point is to provide services that encourage responsible fatherhood within the context of marriage.

### **Examples of Technical Assistance (TA) and Monitoring**

Both the Healthy Marriage and Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives use a number of methods of technical assistance to help grantees further their learning and have accessible best practice models, as well as addressing specific grantee needs as they arise. To address broad based grantee needs, OFA, the NHMRC, and the NRFC hold monthly interactive webinars, specific for each initiative. To directly respond to grantee needs OFA, NHMRC, and NRFC TA staff have conducted site visits, peer roundtable discussions, and TA conferences. To guide these efforts and monitor grantee progress and development, OFA has developed a set of site visit protocols to follow, and requires grantees to submit progress reports at regular intervals, including 30-days, 90-days, and 6-months.

Following established site visit protocols, a series of targeted technical assistance site visits were conducted by NHMRC and NRFC staff and Federal Project Officers during FY 2006. The

NHMRC also hosted a peer roundtable event in Oklahoma where grantees shared common experiences and advice and received individualized TA based on specific challenges that they worked to identify during the event. Promoting Responsible Fatherhood grantee site visits included trips to grantees in Vermont, curriculum guidance in Arizona, and providing web-building support in Alaska.

### **States in the Spotlight: TANF Activities Supporting Two-Parent Married Families**

Seeing the same potential for fostering self-sufficiency by supporting the development and maintenance of two-parent married families, States have utilized various approaches and funding strategies. This section of the report provides an overview of these types of activities in a selection of eleven States.

#### Alabama

The Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) provides for the protection, well-being, and self-sufficiency of children and adults in a multitude of ways. Activities around promoting responsible fatherhood and healthy marriage are two of the strategies DHR uses to support children, families, and individuals.

In the area of promoting responsible fatherhood, Alabama organized a conference on fatherhood to help fathers develop skills over the course of this past year. Alabama's Third Annual Fatherhood Conference was held May 3 – 5, 2006. The theme was expanded this year to include healthy marriage issues, an area which is closely related to the fatherhood area. At this conference, topics and speakers included Patsy Riley, the First Lady of Alabama, who spoke on the importance of healthy marriages to nurture children and build strong communities. Dr. Rozario Slack, from the organization First Things First, described how this nonprofit organization promotes fatherhood and healthy marriages in Chattanooga and Hamilton County, Tennessee, as a model for the attendees to consider in their own cities in Alabama. From Auburn University, Dr. Francesca Adler-Baeder spoke, with other panel members about the role that love plays in healthy marriages and responsible fatherhood. Lastly, Carol Gundlach from the Alabama Coalition Against Domestic Violence presented information on identifying and responding to domestic violence in fatherhood and healthy marriage programs.

Moreover, the Alabama Fatherhood Initiative (AFI) program funded 31 local fatherhood programs to prevent unwed fatherhood, to encourage participation in children's lives and address other issues related to fatherhood. AFI is a network of agencies and organizations that assists non-custodial parents in enhancing their ability to provide financial support to their children. AFI developed a Short-Term Skills Training Pilot Project to help non-custodial fathers who suffer from unemployment and underemployment to be able to make their child support payments. Working with AFI core partners, DHR built capacity for the project by securing commitments from partners for funding and the development of short-term training courses for non-custodial parents at two community colleges.

In the area of promoting healthy marriages, in addition to the dual focus of the Fatherhood Conference detailed above, DHR assisted Francesca Adler-Baeder of Auburn University with the

publication of a Marriage Handbook which will be given out to couples getting marriage licenses at court houses. The publication was unveiled by the Governor and First Lady on Valentine's Day 2006 at a special marriage ceremony. The healthy marriage project at the SAFE Family Services Center in Sylacauga continues to serve couples and families with counseling and support services.

### Connecticut

Connecticut's Fatherhood Initiative is a broad-based, statewide program led by the Department of Social Services. The initiative focuses on changing the systems that can improve fathers' abilities to be fully and positively involved in the lives of their children. In order to promote responsible fatherhood, Connecticut's program encourages the emotional and financial involvement of fathers in their children's lives, and works to create supports for fathers to take that role of responsible parent.

By encouraging the emotional and financial involvement of fathers in their children's lives, the program seeks to emphasize the overall importance of fathers for their children and families. For example, the Fatherhood Initiative assists men in preparing for the legal, financial, and emotional responsibilities of fatherhood. Non-custodial parents have more challenges with all three of these areas of responsibility.

Another important aspect of the Connecticut objectives involves promoting the establishment of paternity at childbirth. By doing so, fathers know from the start what their responsibilities are towards their child. Lastly, the initiative encourages fathers, regardless of marital status, to foster their emotional connection to and financial support of their children. Children depend on their fathers both emotionally and financially, so the program seeks to instill a sense of these dual responsibilities in the fathers with whom they work.

By working to create supports for fathers to be truly involved in their children's lives, Connecticut's Fatherhood Initiative seeks to create a culture of responsible fatherhood. One way the initiative is encouraging the establishment of this culture is by promoting public education concerning the financial and emotional responsibilities of fatherhood. The Fatherhood Initiative is creating support mechanisms for fathers in their relationship with their children, regardless of their marital and financial status, and is integrating State and local services available for families.

### Florida

Florida has made significant progress in promoting responsible fatherhood and healthy marriages for couples who choose to make this commitment through their Healthy Marriage Initiative. Within the State, a total of 217 organizations (68 faith-based, 133 community-based) were involved in working on the fatherhood and marriage initiatives. Of these 217 organizations, Florida's Department of Children and Families (DCF) supports the 13 community and faith-based organizations that are working on federal grants on these issues, ultimately contributing to family strengthening efforts and the well-being of the State's children.

Specifically, the DCF's Strengthening Families Initiative Office actively supported public awareness campaigns, worked on capacity building, offered training activities, and conducted research on fatherhood and healthy marriage issues. It will continue to be supportive with technical assistance as needed to the 13 Florida organizations that were awarded grants. Some of the project highlights for the past year follow.

Through the Building Hispanic Healthy Marriage Project (BHHMP), a series of Strengthening Hispanic Families training events have increased the number of faith-based and community child and family service providers that have been exposed to Strengthening Families curriculum. BHHMP delivers healthy marriage education to Hispanic families in Tampa, Miami, and Orlando. The Miami-Dade Head Start Collaboration was the impetus for the BHHMP.

In May 2006, Florida sent a delegation of nine representatives to the National Hispanic Healthy Marriage conference in San Antonio, Texas. The delegation represented the Strengthening Hispanic Families coalitions from Ft. Lauderdale, Miami, Orlando, Tallahassee, and Tampa.

Another success for the healthy marriage program has been the Building African American Healthy Marriage Project (BAAHMP). BAAHMP delivers healthy marriage education to African American families in Jacksonville, Pensacola, and Broward, Florida. Through this important series of training classes, greater numbers of community and faith-based organizations have built their capacity and their knowledge of the Strengthening Families curriculum.

Lastly, the Strengthening Families/Head Start Connection Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the Florida Department of Children and Families, Florida's Head Start State Collaboration Office, Florida Head Start Association, Florida Department of Community Affairs, and Florida Association for Community Action, Inc., in April 2006. The purpose of this State MOU is to build capacity for relationship skills and healthy marriage education for couples and to increase awareness within the Community Action Agencies, Head Start Programs, and the broader community statewide.

### Georgia

Georgia also has established the Fatherhood Initiative, which focuses on providing non-custodial parents with job skills so that they are able to find employment and contribute to the support of their children. The two major focuses for the State of Georgia in their fatherhood initiative efforts have been to enhance job skills and communicate the importance of parents in children's lives.

It is important for non-custodial parents to develop job skills and financial literacy to help them support their children and themselves. Training for specific types of job skills are important, such as internet and general computer skills, which may be new to some non-custodial parents who may be re-entering the workforce or entering professional office work environments for the first time. In order to promote economic stability, Georgia's program offers such services as financial planning seminars, employment materials, and coordination with existing employment services.

Furthermore, an important part of reaching non-custodial parents is to encourage them to spend time with their children and become a part of their lives. Throughout the State, billboards, posters, and public service announcements utilizing well-known athletes have been used to foster the support of both parents for their children. These celebrities help to convey the message that both parents are important in the lives of their children. This type of advertising reinforces the work that local programs are doing in their fatherhood outreach efforts. Such messages help to reinforce an overall culture of the importance of non-custodial parents continuing to be part of, and contributing to, the lives of their children. In some instances these efforts have resulted in the marriage of the parents, but even if the parents do not live together the child benefits from the involvement of both parents. The State also provides adoption subsidy assistance to support the formation of two-parent families, thereby creating financial incentives for parents to come together to support their children as a family unit.

### Indiana

Indiana's Fatherhood Initiative uses TANF funds to support community based efforts that promote and restore fatherhood. Indiana has chosen to work with local community based organizations to promote fatherhood throughout the State.

The State of Indiana has chosen to invest in projects that establish or expand effective fatherhood involvement strategies. Such strategies are broad based and serve to promote fathers' emotional and financial involvement in their children's lives. Emotionally, fathers learn the importance of doing simple things while spending time with their children, such as reading to them and eating meals together. Financial involvement in their children's lives often means a multi-faceted approach to employment and education. For example, job readiness training, employment placement, GED preparation, parenting education, and other educational support are all part of such financial involvement.

Other services provided to Indiana parents include child development and responsible parenting classes. Skill-based parenting education is an important means of teaching parents how to parent effectively. Other issues that may be covered in responsible parenting classes include disseminating information on the causes of domestic violence and child abuse, counseling and mentoring to the parents involved, and offering mediation training and skill building. Lastly, the State offers supervised visitation for non-custodial parents to have opportunities to spend time with their children.

### Louisiana

The State of Louisiana has a strong commitment to children, youth, and families. The Department of Social Services (DSS) seeks to build a stronger Louisiana by helping individuals, children, and families achieve safer and more independent lives. Knowing that 24 million children (34 percent) live absent their biological father, and that 1.35 million births (33 percent of all births) in 2000 occurred out of wedlock, the State has undertaken initiatives towards supporting families by promoting responsible parenting and fatherhood, as well as promoting family strengthening.

Around the issue of responsible parenting and fatherhood, Louisiana's DSS has entered into contracts with public agencies, non-profit, and for-profit organizations to create programs that will assist low income fathers with various skills. Such skill building programs range from employment training and opportunities to life skills, responsible parenting, and other skills in order to increase their ability to provide emotional and financial support for their children. The State also has worked to create a network of community and faith-based programs that will provide additional support for low income fathers. This network also is designed to link State entities in this effort.

Family strengthening is an important strategy for supporting children and parents to lead full, healthy lives together. Louisiana provides services to improve and promote family relationships, such as counseling and relationship building training. In addition, the State encourages marriage and seeks to reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock births. Such programs also seek to decrease the divorce rate. DSS is dedicated to working with and supplying young people with guidance to break out of the cycle of living in fatherless homes.

### Mississippi

Recognizing the importance of healthy marriage, Mississippi has worked to foster collaboration and understanding of healthy marriages and healthy families. Mississippi's Department of Human Services (MDHS) has been leading these efforts.

Fostering the creation of coalitions has been important in expanding knowledge of and services to support, healthy marriage within Mississippi. On February 14, 2006, the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) Division of Economic Assistance, Healthy Marriage Unit, hosted a Healthy Marriage Coalition meeting. Forty-seven representatives from State, local, and faith-based organizations from across the State were in attendance. MDHS staff and the other coalition members have had ongoing meetings to further define roles within the coalition, such as assessing the resources each organization can provide, and identifying other organizations and individuals as potential members of the coalition. They also have drafted a mission statement. As a result of the February 2006 meeting, Catholic Charities in Jackson and Outreach Ministries in Brookhaven established coalitions in their areas. Defining roles for government agencies and offices is important for any new initiative that is being implemented statewide. The MDHS Division of Economic Assistance continues to meet with the divisions of Family and Children Services, Child Support Enforcement, and Community Services to fully define the agency's role in the Healthy Marriage Initiative. After each group's role is established, the Healthy Marriage Initiative will be further integrated into the work of these groups.

Lastly, training and educational opportunities are an important part of supporting and sustaining healthy marriages in Mississippi. TANF FY 2006 funds are being used to provide 100 percent funding for 39 Family Resource Centers located throughout the State. Healthy marriage education and counseling is included in the scope of services available through the Centers. During the last two weeks of February 2006, MDHS staff and the Families First Resource Center subgrantees received training on Franklin Covey's The 8 Habits of a Successful Marriage. This

training further helped these leaders to implement healthy marriage educational opportunities in their work. MDHS staff created an innovative educational opportunity for visitors.

In observance of Marriage Week, MDHS staff displayed their wedding pictures on the first floor of their building. Also, a similar display was set up at the Mississippi Capitol Rotunda during the afternoon of February 14, 2006.

### New Mexico

New Mexico has made significant strides towards supporting responsible fatherhood and strengthening families over the past year. Through the New Mexico Department of Health, the State has done outreach to parents around the importance of sound parenting skills and relationship skills. Recognizing that families and communities play a critical role in helping parents stay involved with, and supportive of, their children, New Mexico has designed programs to help parents learn about why being an actively involved parent is so important to their children and to address family dysfunction, as well as to learn creative and effective strategies for strengthening their families.

New Mexico's Health Services Department (HSD) has entered into an agreement with the New Mexico State University Family and Consumer Sciences Department of Extension Home Economics to provide services for and address family dysfunction. In this partnership, the program provides training on parenting and relationship skills. They also offer many other services that address barriers that parents and families face. Services are available in most counties throughout the State.

Secondly, the Strengthening Families Initiative offers important resources to parents and families. Parents who participate in this program receive intensive parenting education enhanced with life skills education. Each class series met once a week for 2.5 hours for 15-24 weeks. During this comprehensive class experience, parents received at least 3 hours of life skills and 3 hours of nutrition education. While parents were attending classes, children participated in a children's program.

### Oklahoma

Oklahoma has worked to promote responsible fatherhood through their Fatherhood Initiative and to promote healthy marriages for couples who choose to make this commitment through their Healthy Marriage Initiative. Both programs ultimately serve to support children and foster healthy development within their family unit. Working with parents who are being released from prison has been the major focus for Oklahoma's fatherhood initiative effort, while responsible parenting and relationship skill training have been the focus of the State's Healthy Marriage Initiative.

In Oklahoma, the fatherhood initiative has sought to partner with outside agencies, including the Department of Corrections and faith-based organizations, to prepare parents who are released from prison for reunification with family and to prepare for employment. Re-entry of such parents poses challenges both for the individual and for the family. The initiative seeks to give

those parents the skills and supports they need to transition successfully into the job force and re-integrate them into their family lives. Employment preparation can include programs offering services such as training clients in specific job skills, offering financial planning seminars, disseminating employment materials, coordinating with existing services, and helping fathers improve their economic status.

Training around the issue of domestic violence is an important aspect of many responsible fatherhood programs. In Oklahoma, domestic violence interactive training is provided to assist staff in recognizing domestic violence and offering help to both batterers and victims through interventions and referrals.

For the Marriage Initiative, Oklahoma has implemented a training workshop series called the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP). Since December 2005, approximately 558 PREP workshops have been completed throughout the State, serving 24,520 participants. An additional 294 individuals also have been trained in PREP workshops offered statewide. These workshops provide instructional guidance to families on how to build healthy relationships and how to parent effectively and responsibly. The workshops provide a format for families to follow in the development of their relationships and interactions with others. These guidelines offer a structure for families to compare their behavior against and make modifications for healthy living.

In an effort to promote marriage and provide a more secure and stable family situation, an adjustment period of up to three months of the existing TANF benefit can be approved by State employees. The intent of the adjustment period is to assist the family in the payment of outstanding bills and to allow for the gradual assumption of financial responsibilities. When a TANF recipient marries and the income of the spouse will close the case, an adjustment period can be made available to the family. This financial incentive also is meant to support these families as they are reunified.

### Utah

Utah has funded a number of initiatives to stabilize and support families, marriage, and employment of TANF eligible families with various needed services. For those who choose marriage, the State of Utah provided several innovative programs for support and education. Some of Utah's strategies for promoting healthy marriages include in-person training, educational opportunities, and internet resources. These programs and activities reach approximately 63,615 families and individuals.

For example, Utah sponsored several educational seminars and opportunities around promoting healthy marriages. In 2006-2007, 560 professional counselors and faith leaders attended educational seminars held in the State. These community leaders work directly with hundreds of couples in their different settings throughout the year. This healthy marriage training had great benefits for larger numbers of Utah citizens served by these counselors and faith leaders. Further, 500 individuals attended another healthy marriage conference organized by the State.

The State also decided to reach couples with an educational opportunity at the moment of their official commitment to one another, and 24,109 people received a marriage booklet with their

marriage licenses. Such outreach to couples at the time of their marriage licensing is an innovative way to impact couples' knowledge of, and access to, healthy marriage practices.

Lastly, Utah used the internet to effectively reach a number of citizens over the course of the year. The State created a unique website with tools and information specifically for couples within Utah to learn more about how to build healthy marriages, dating and marriage preparation, and suggestions on how to make marriages succeed, including issues such as communication, handling finances, etc. This website, [www.Utahmarriage.org](http://www.Utahmarriage.org), received an average of 2,882 visits per month. Furthermore, a healthy marriage online course, Marriage Moments, offered through the website [www.Utahmarriage.org](http://www.Utahmarriage.org), had a successful year: individuals made 3,862 unique visits to the Marriage Moments on-line course, learning skills for building and maintaining healthy marriages.

### West Virginia

In fulfilling a purpose of the TANF program to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families, West Virginia continues to develop and expand the State Healthy Marriage/Healthy Families Initiative. West Virginia has developed a plan to provide marriage and relationship trainings to improve relationships between parents and between parents and their children. Important stakeholders from government agencies, community based organizations, and faith based organizations are leaders for the State's Healthy Marriage/Healthy Families Initiative Steering Committee which is implementing programming throughout the State.

The steering committee for the West Virginia Healthy Marriage/Healthy Families Initiative represents a diverse group of stakeholders. From West Virginia's State government, representatives serve as leaders from the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, West Virginia Bureau for Child Support Enforcement and WV WORKS, which is West Virginia's TANF Program. WV WORKS is based on the goals of assisting economically dependent and at-risk families to become self supporting, enhancing the well-being of children, and assisting families near the poverty level to remain self-sufficient. Representatives from the West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, West Virginia University's Extension Department, West Virginia State University Extension Service, and other private and faith-based groups within the State also serve as leaders to plan for and implement marriage and relationship trainings to improve relationships between parents, as well as relationships between parents and children.

Currently, eight counties are actively involved in the State Healthy Marriage/Healthy Families Initiative. West Virginia plans to expand the program to provide services to families throughout the State. Programs have been funded through grants to West Virginia University and West Virginia State University. For example, West Virginia University's Extension program has created a "Healthy Marriage and Healthy Family Coalition." This coalition helps couples and families find ways to communicate better, to develop healthy relationships, and to learn effective problem-solving skills.

