

**Administration for Children and Families**  
**Working Together to Strengthen Families Conference**  
**Pacific Hub**  
**Seattle, Washington**  
**August 12 - 13 2002**

ACF Pacific Hub's 2-day "Strengthening Families" conference drew more than 435 community, State, Tribal, and national leaders to Seattle to hear and discuss ways to implement ACF's new family initiatives. The conference featured more than 30 speakers and 20 workshop sessions and is believed to be the largest such gathering ever assembled by ACF. The audience included child and family advocates, academics, Head Start grantees, health care workers, social workers, religious leaders, Tribal representatives, and public policy administrators.

Deputy Secretary Claude A. Allen delivered the keynote address at the opening plenary, providing clear explanations of the new initiatives and illustrating each one with personal asides. He received a standing ovation when he concluded and yielded the floor to Families Northwest president Jeff Kemp. Kemp, a professional football veteran like his dad, scored often with apt sports metaphors as he described his organization's efforts to strengthen families across the Northwest.

More than six months of meticulous planning paid off handsomely for the Pacific Hub. A joint San Francisco-Seattle conference team identified experts, pushed attendance, and planned the schedule. Other regional staff members joined the effort as the conference approached. Logistics were handled by ACF's contractor, AFYA of suburban Maryland.

Workshop sessions ran along five tracks: Relationships, Model Programs, Fatherhood, Youth, and Tribal. Dr. Howard Markman provided a 90-minute presentation on PREP at the Opening Plenary and an associate presented his all-day PREP class on the conference's final day. The class attracted so many last-minute registrations that extra chairs and tables had to be brought in to accommodate them.

Les Parrott addressed the second morning's plenary session, delighting the audience with his wit and prescriptive wisdom on building and enhancing relationships. Luncheon speaker Marvin Charles, founder of Divine Alternatives for Dads, told a powerful story of reunion and redemption 45 years after a state social services agency took him as an infant from his mother's home. Most poignantly, his mother, father and wife were present at the head table with him to acknowledge the audience's heartfelt ovation.

Hub Director Sharon Fujii and Region X Administrator Steve Henigson co-hosted the conference and shared emcee duties. ACF Regional Operations Director Diann Dawson and Regional Director Carolyn Oakley offered remarks to the plenary and introduced the HHS Deputy Secretary and Mr. Kemp, respectively. An evening reception on the 35<sup>th</sup> floor of the hotel provided additional opportunities for participants to network while enjoying stunning views of downtown Seattle.

## Keynote Address

Deputy Secretary Claude Allen provided conference participants with a comprehensive overview of the reasons the administration is working to increase programs and services that directly promote marriage and healthy families. He shared a statement that President Bush made in celebration of national Family Week:

"My Administration is committed to strengthening the American family. Many one-parent families are also a source of comfort and reassurance, yet a family with a mom and dad who are committed to marriage and devote themselves to their children helps provide children a sound foundation for success. Government can support families by promoting policies that help strengthen the institution of marriage and help parents rear their children in positive and healthy environments."

Deputy Secretary Allen also emphasized what the Department will not do:

- It will not force anyone to marry anyone.
- It will not get the government into match-making business -- the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families has made it clear to me that he has no interest in running a federal dating service.
- It will not- intentionally or otherwise- implement policies that will trap anyone in an abusive relationship.
- It will not promote marriage by withdrawing supports for single-parent families.
- It will not promote marriage by being afraid to mention its name.
- Perhaps most of all, it will not promote marriage by rendering marriage meaningless as some would do by equating marriage with cohabitation.

Deputy Secretary Allen shared a few of the ways that the administration is looking at tackling this issue:

- Raise the vision for in-hospital paternity establishment to include marriage, and not just paternity establishment. . .when a child is born and the father sees him or her for the first time, that is when he is encouraged to, and is most likely to, establish paternity. Why not also ask the question if the couple has considered marriage.
- Provide referrals to pre-marital education programs at those "magical moments" in couples' lives when they are contemplating marriage.
- Increase access for marital enrichment in social programs which seek to "strengthen families" such as Head Start
- Utilize public education campaigns to highlight the benefits of healthy marriages.
- Increase support for marital intervention services so that troubled marriages can be made whole again.

Mr. Allen thanked the states and communities in the Pacific Hub for their innovative approaches to providing services to families, and their hard work.

## **General Session**

### **“Helping Couples Who Choose Marriage Achieve Success”**

**Howard Markman, Ph.D**

Dr. Markman made a 90-minute presentation to an audience of more than 400 at the opening plenary Monday morning. According to Markman, “The vast majority of all people desire happy, lasting marriages, whether rich or poor, male or female, and regardless of their cultural background.”

Dr. Markman also maintains that society as a whole benefits when “those who choose marriage for themselves are able to maintain healthy marriages.” Therefore, it is a worthy goal “to make this dream more attainable for more Americans.”

Divorce numbers have leveled off or are dropping slightly, but the number of people living together, unmarried, is up sharply. Many marriages are stable but unhappy.

Adults and children are at increased risk for mental and physical problems due to marital conflicts. Mismanaged conflicts predict both marital distress and negative effects on children. Conflicts at home lead to decreased work productivity, especially for men.

Dr. Markman gave this rationale for relationship education: Key findings converge across studies demonstrate that it’s not the differences between couples that matter in predicting distress and divorce as much as how differences are handled. Couples can be taught how to handle differences, to talk without fighting about important issues.

The results from relationship education programs are promising: couples can “protect positives”, decrease negatives and increase chances for marital happiness over time.

PREP, which stands for “The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program,” is a “research-based approach to helping couples prevent divorce and preserve a lasting love,” based on more than 23 years of research and the University of Denver and other universities. Dr. Markman says PREP is the only educational program for couples that has been studied in long-term, controlled follow-ups. It is regularly updated, based on research and practice.

An assistant to Dr. Markman conducted a one-day PREP workshop on Wednesday, August 14. Several additional last-minute registrants required extra tables and chairs to be moved in to accommodate them.

## **General Session: Making Bad Relationships Better and Good Relationships Great**

**Dr. Les Parrott,**

**Founder of the Center for Relationship Development, Seattle Pacific University**

Dr. Parrott talked about the need for people to have better information about what we know about relationships and marriage. Currently, there is a great deal of information but young people aren't taught what they need to know about relationships. If you try to build intimacy with another person before you have done the hard work of getting whole on your own, all your other relationships will become an attempt to complete yourself.

About eight years ago Dr. Parrott proposed a course on relationships at Seattle Pacific University. The course was to cover such topics as: What to do when friends fail you, how to keep family ties from pulling your strings, how to find love without losing your mind, how to breakup, and similar topics. The proposed course was refused several times. It was finally permitted as a pass/fail general elective on Dr. Parrott's own time. He was hoping for 20 students, but there was such a hunger for this kind of information that 300 students signed up for it. It has continued to be a "sell out" course with students, and their responses to the course have continued to reinforce Dr. Parrott's belief that more of this type of education is needed.

Dr. Parrott advised that one of the most important things to know about relationships is that they don't really "complete" people. When people try to build intimacy with another person before they've done the hard work of getting whole themselves, their relationships will become unsuccessful attempts at completing themselves through another person.

Dr. Parrott shared a number of key concepts about relationships:

- A relationship can only be as healthy as the least healthy person in it.
- Get yourself healthy before you get yourself married.
- Relationships are not a short cut to mental health.
- Understand who you are and how the dynamics of any relationship works.

What is needed is to have an awareness of yourself. The process of "getting whole" does not have to be totally completed first.

Dr. Parrott shared his view of four phases of developing relationships: pseudo relationship, chaos, emptiness, and genuine relationship.

1. Pseudo relationship is the way all relationships start. Conversation is mostly small talk.
2. As a relationship begins to develop, it moves into the chaos stage. This happens when one person begins to express some true feelings and bumps up against something that the two people don't see eye to eye on.
3. As you become more involved, you may want the other person to be different than they are. This is the emptiness stage. We need to empty ourselves of our need to change another person for the relationship to grow.
4. When you can relax and be who you are, you have a genuine relationship, a relationship that is as comfortable as an easy chair.

## **General Session**

### **Increasing Marital Success**

**Jeff Kemp, President**  
**Families Northwest**

Jeff Kemp talked about the importance of increasing marital success in order to provide children with the stable foundation they need. He commented that a "conditional performance-based value system" has seeped into our way of life, displacing the unconditional relationships that children need for healthy development." He emphasized that marriage was formerly a child-centered social system, and that we have been moving away from that focus.

Mr. Kemp advocated for a more faith-based approach to the challenges of marriage and family stability. He cited studies that say 80% of marriages are performed by clergy, providing an important opportunity to intervene with meaningful marriage preparation.

Families Northwest has brought religious leaders in Washington state together on a pledge to set minimum standards for couples who want to be married by their clergy. More than 700 religious bodies of 40 denominations in 24 communities across Washington have signed the agreements. All now provide premarital counseling and parenting seminars as a requirement of being married by clergy.

Kemp believes that a long term, cooperative effort can increase the rate of marital success, enhance the rate of marital health, and create a cultural foundation that supports marriage and builds healthy families.

While a change in cultural habits is required in this effort, Kemp is optimistic that such a change is coming. He pointed to the success of public service campaigns that have had

dramatic success in changing public perceptions through concerted effort and consistent messages.

## **General Session**

### **Divine Alternatives for Dads Services (D.A.D.S.)**

**Marvin Charles, Founder and Executive Director**

D.A.D.S. provides support and assistance to fathers who need help in repairing their relationships with their families. Mr. Charles told the amazing story of his own life to illustrate the importance of such services.

Mr. Charles shared that he had been taken from his teen-aged mother when he was an infant. His difficult early life was filled with both emotional and physical abuse from his adoptive family. He ran away from home, became addicted to alcohol and crack cocaine, and fathered three children born on crack. His children were removed from his care. At his lowest point, he prayed that he could save his family.

Through a series of surprising coincidences, Mr. Charles was able to reunite with his birth mother as an adult. She had never stopped thinking about him or looking for him and the reunion brought much healing for both of them. Together, they set out to find his birth father and were successful. This second reunion led to a renewed relationship between his mother and father as well.

Since Mr. Charles “hit bottom”, over four years ago, he has been off drugs, has married the mother of his children and regained custody of his children. He has made it his work to help other men who have been in difficult circumstances to become good fathers to their children.

Because of his personal realization of the importance of the role of fathers in the family unit, he works to educate and support other fathers who need help to be a positive force in their children’s lives.

## **Tribal Track**

### **Session 1**

#### **Providing Positive Parenting for Native Youth**

**Caren Trujillo, Consultant**

This session focused on the importance of parents providing protection, nurturing, trust and unconditional love to their children.

Ms. Trujillo pointed out that each of us has physical, emotional, spiritual and mental qualities. Wellness implies harmony with body, mind and spirit. Most disease or illness relates to unresolved emotion. Taking care of self first is important in being able to care for others. Each person is responsible for his/her own wellness and has within the power to heal themselves.

Over the ages, many have adopted the belief that we are not whole and we need help from the outside. The attitude of looking outside to be fixed involves giving our power away.

Ms. Trujillo commented that no offensive weapon ever developed is so potentially dangerous or more capable of inflicting pain than the human tongue. We must have ways of ensuring that no matter what anyone says, we keep the belief that we are a good person.

As parents, we put our children at the center of our lives. We need to learn to listen to our children, with our eyes (seeing), our ears (hearing), our heart (feeling), and our mind (knowing). We need to be aware of things that impact our speaking and listening, such as tiredness or other emotional states.

Barriers to communication can include not using "I" messages to express thoughts and feelings to another. Rather than saying "You make me feel," we can say "When you do . . . I feel . . ." (angry, sad, happy, etc.)

Parent communication tips were shared, including the caution that parents should not assume that it is their "fault" if a child is not communicating openly. Sometimes it helps to ask the child, "If I wasn't available to talk, or you can't talk to me about something, who would you go to?" Let kids choose their mentors, the person they want to talk to.

## **Session 2**

### **Marriage/Relationship Enrichment for Native American Couples**

**Gordon and Pam James**

This session focused on ways to strengthen marriages for Native American couples. The presenters emphasized the importance of creating positive habits or behavior to support the relationship, and noted that habits are learned behavior. Those who experienced the impacts of death, sexual/physical/emotional abuse; racism; alcoholism; loss of spirituality; divorce; gambling addiction; poverty or drug addiction as children will have learned behaviors in order to cope with these traumas that may not be helpful in the present.

Creating positive change was seen as the responsibility of those in the relationship, and in order to do so there were three steps involved:

1. Break the pattern.

2. Gain emotional leverage.
3. Create a new behavior

### **Session 3**

#### **Tanana Chiefs Conference TANF Program Partnership with Love, INC.**

**Don Shircel, Director of TCC Family Services**

**Tanana Chiefs Conference**

**Bob Ingalls, Executive Director**

**Love, INC. , Fairbanks, Alaska**

This session highlighted the partnership between the TANF program run by the Tanana Chiefs Conference and the Love, INC. program in Fairbanks, Alaska.

The Athabascan Self-Sufficiency Partnership (ASAP) program is intended to strengthen families and supply them with more locally based opportunities to become self-sufficient. It is an aggressive plan that invests the time and energy of all family members and the community as equal partners in welfare reform.

This assistance is provided to promote work, promote marriage, promote fatherhood and discourage out of wedlock pregnancies.

The tribal administration of the TANF program has resulted in local one stop services in each of 38 isolated villages; an increased range of services; service coordination and funding coordination for tribal communities; elimination of marriage disincentives; development of regional and village data base and information systems; and regional and culturally appropriate planning, program design and administration.

The program works in coordination with many other organizations, including Love, INC. Love, Inc. in Fairbanks is one of 114 offices across the country. The program began in Michigan to provide opportunities for church members to provide services in the community. A variety of services are provided. The basic goal is to meet needs not being met in the community, including physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

### **Session 4**

#### **Reclaiming the Family**

**Chani Phillips, Ph.D.**

Dr. Phillips noted that the first key world view to help us heal ourselves and our relationships is that we are all related. When we see everyone and everything as separate from ourselves, it leads us away from harmony and strength. Being aware of our interconnectedness causes us to care for and nurture one another.

Steps to healing a family include:

1. Identify strengths and resources
2. Identify stories, roles and patterns
3. Enhance connectedness
4. Empower parents and children
5. Provide therapeutic and other resources
6. Provide support

Dr. Phillips noted that stages of life relate to the four directions with East reflecting childhood; South reflecting adolescence; West reflecting adult and North reflecting the elderly. The directions also relate to elements of relationships:

- East: belonging, strong sense of belonging
- South: mastery; mastering strong sense of self
- West: interdependence; learning that it is good to depend and rely upon others
- North: generosity; healthy adults give back

Through healing the sacred self, we can reclaim our gifts. Who we are is our gift to others. In reclaiming ourselves, we can instill our gifts within our families; teach our children to be empowered and to be who they are.

## **Session 5**

### **Establishing and Nurturing an American Indian/Alaskan Native Men's Support Group**

**Clayton Small, Ph.D. , Educator**

Dr. Small noted that many Native American men are dealing with long standing issues of shame and issues of historical identity which impact them as fathers. Some have unhealthy coping mechanisms (abusive behavior) and some have healthy coping mechanisms (leadership, counseling, teaching, spirituality). For all men, attending to their own health and healing is necessary in order to support themselves as fathers.

Dr. Small believes that teachings must:

1. Keep it simple
2. Maintain spirit
3. Use humor
4. Be flexible
5. Be ready
6. Use imagination
7. Understand fear
8. Move to act

He reviewed some of the concepts in his video, which helps Native American men to be better husbands and fathers.

He presented a model based on the four directions (North, South, East, West) and elements associated with each that make up the good road of life.

## **Youth Track**

### **Session 1**

#### **Importance of Fathers in the Lives of Their Children**

**Octavio Castelo, Head Start**

**Los Angeles County Office of Education**

The mission statement of this program is to assist men in becoming positive role models in order to assist their children to become successful.

Three Father Forums were held throughout the year. At the first forum, in February 2002, over 300 people attended. About 60% of participants were male, and eight "Father of the Year" awards were given, along with 32 honorable mentions. At the second forum, held in April 2002, 640 people attended. Sixty-five percent of participants were male, and 24 "Father of the Year" awards were given. At the third forum, in May 2002, 420 attended.

Mr. Castelo demonstrated how everyone has been impacted strongly by a male in their lives, and how important it is to support positive impacts. He cautioned that all agencies should really examine how staff interacts with males, and what assumptions they have about positive male impacts, in order to determine whether they are really encouraging the involvement of fathers.

Benefits of male involvement include having a model of adult male behavior, making choices, problem solving abilities, and providing financial and emotional support. Obstacles to male involvement include getting fathers into the school building in the first place, institutional practices that are not "father friendly", language and cultural barriers, the education of the parents, and time pressures.

He pointed out that more male workers bring in more male parents. Progress reports for non-custodial, non-residential parents can help get fathers involved. Providing information and training to both parents is also important. Using males who are involved to bring in other males is a good strategy.

### **Session 2**

## **Keep Your Freedom, Keep Your Dreams**

**Carolyn Kellams**

In this session, participants discussed the reasons teens get pregnant, including attention, social acceptance and the glamorized view many have of motherhood. It is difficult for parents and teachers to challenge some of these forces, but other teens can have a great impact.

Teens with goals are less likely to get pregnant. The program trains teen parents to speak about their lives, giving presentations to schools, city councils and government officials. Because teens will listen to other teens more than adults, these presentations have more impact than the same information coming from adults.

The program tries to get fathers involved, also. Mentors are available, fathers are invited to programs, and services are knit together to support both mothers and fathers.

A key to the program is helping the teen parents become skilled in telling their stories. They are taught to have a powerful opening, to make a list of 35 things they want to talk about, to choose three points from the list and to cover the material so often that they have it down. They are video-taped and critiqued, and coached on how to adapt their presentations to be age-appropriate.

### **Session 3**

#### **Building Community. . . Being Sons, Being Fathers**

**Refugio Rodriguez, Community Action Commission**

**Santa Barbara County, California**

At-risk teens need preparation to become the next generation of parents and citizens. Today young men are living in an increasingly diverse society with new technologies and new challenges. Male sexual activity begins around age 13 for many. Traditional agency approaches do not address the special needs of fathers or high-risk young men.

Often, programs that target at-risk youth may face obstacles. For instance, staff may not be qualified or trained to work with low-income families. Agency/bureaucratic protocols, educational criteria of agencies, single focus funding, location of service delivery and staff fears may all interfere with serving this population effectively.

There are significant identity issues among Latino youth who are born in the United States versus those born in other countries.

Often children are ashamed of their parents, and there are conflicting cultures among school and home and between generations. Many Latino males have missed having a strong father presence in their lives, either because their father was absent or was working multiple jobs and physically away from the family most of the time.

## **Session 4**

### **Services to Homeless Youth**

**Gary Hammons, Executive Director  
Northwest Network for Youth**

Mr. Hammons noted that youth do not get the positive support from families, community or schools that they did in the past, and that there is often a focus on negatives when it comes to young people. He mentioned that youth who do not have the relationships and mentoring that they need from adults may look to gangs for these connections. He sees schools as focused on control and babysitting rather than on education, and this has a negative impact on kids.

Mr. Hammons tries to support positive youth development by creating after school and other programs for youth that are targeted at the strengths and interests of the youths.

Most homeless and runaway youth have had serious problems in school and the schools were not well suited to engage these youths. He mentioned that the 4H programs have been successful in positive youth development.

## **Session 5**

### **Relationship Skill Building for Youth**

**Ron Taylor, Skyline High School  
Lisa Merrifield, Life Choices**

This session focused on the SHARE program (Sexuality, Health, and Relationship Education) and Life Choices (Pregnancy Clinics). SHARE is a nationally recognized leader in abstinence education and one of the largest programs of its kind in the United States.

Since 1987, SHARE has focused on empowering young people to make healthy relationship choices. SHARE instructors are trained to be fun, creative and energetic. Presentations are available for educators to enhance their health curriculum. SHARE partners with community organizations that work with strengthening families.

Traits of young people today include a drive for authenticity; large amounts of disposable income; technologically savvy; tolerant/relativistic; highly ambitious and motivated. Teens are faced with both great promise and great peril.

The presenters recommended two books about this generation:

- **Millennials Rising: The Next American Generation**  
Neil Howe and William Strauss

- Welcome to the Jungle: The Why Behind Generation X  
Geoffrey Holtz

## **Fatherhood Track**

### **Session 1**

#### **Fatherhood and Developmental Disabilities**

**James May, Project Director  
National Fathers' Network**

This session explored the impact on a man when his child(ren) have special needs, and what techniques work best in reaching fathers in this situation.

James May observed that many men do not fully understand how important they are to their children, and this has implications for getting fathers more involved, especially with special needs children. Men may not understand or even recognize their feelings of grief/loss at their children's special needs, or may not accept that something is different about their child.

Men are often relegated to a secondary, less important role in the life of their child, especially if their role is seen as to support the mother, rather than supporting and caring for the child directly.

There are many hurdles that may prevent a man from becoming fully involved in the life of his child. Mothers, and the public in general, may see women as more "expert" or capable of caring for children. Men may fear that they will appear inadequate as fathers when they are in public with their children. Many men experience guilt/shame regarding their special needs children, believing they should be able to solve their child's problems completely or to a greater extent than they are able. Men may experience jealousy or resentment at the amount of time and resources the child requires from the family. Many service providers are women, and they may have a different view of what is acceptable or helpful to the child than the father has. Sometimes mothers, service providers or other women "gatekeep" the role of nurturer, blocking fathers from participating in this type of caring.

Mr. May suggests that there are a number of elements that are important to making a difference in involving fathers:

1. Invite fathers in
2. Keep asking and inviting, don't stop.

3. Make men welcome - create a "father friendly" environment. This includes such things as putting pictures on the walls that men can relate to and including male-oriented magazines in the waiting room.
4. Place fathers in the context of their families.
5. Mention men in your agency newsletters.

## **Session 2**

### **Responsible Fathers - Success Stories/Model Programs**

**Kathleen Ihnken, District Administrator, Division of Child Support  
(Department of Social and Health Services, Tacoma, in collaboration with Devoted Dads)**

**Doug Gertner, Boot Camp for Dads**

**Devoted Dads** is a collaborative project between the State of Washington's Support Enforcement Office and the private, non-profit Devoted Dad's organization. Several other county-based departments, offices and councils are also partners in this effort. The overall goal is to encourage non-custodial fathers to be responsibly involved in the lives of their children. This goal is supported by a strong expectation that such involvement will lead to positive outcomes for the children.

Services include advocacy, help understanding the child support system, help with employment and educational needs, resources to address paternity, custody and child support issues, support groups and mentoring.

A special emphasis is placed on helping fathers avoid the situation of unmanageable child support debt due to not understanding or working with the child support enforcement requirements. While the project carefully separates the issues of child support payment from concerns related to visitation and custody, it does help fathers deal with both of those aspects of their fathering role and responsibility.

This project includes outreach to young men involved in the juvenile justice system.

**Boot Camp for Dad's** began in 1990 and currently is in 150 communities in 37 states. The program was originally hospital-based, and has recently been utilized by Navy hospitals and family service centers.

Expectant fathers attend sessions orienting the new father-to-be; providing "veteran" new dads with needed information; discussions on forming families (first and step families); safety training including prevention of child injury through such things as shaken baby syndrome; on-going support groups and other parenting skills/education. Support services may include clothing, information referral and childcare.

Both these programs observed that there is a strong need for hospital and social service staff, and the community in general, to discard old biases and expectations regarding fathers and to learn new methods for engaging and supporting men/fathers in a proactive and positive fashion.

Both programs have available websites for additional information.

### **Session 3**

## **Working with Incarcerated Parents** **and Non-Custodial Parents**

**Dawn Delong, State of Washington**

**Hilda Redondo, Fresno County, California**

### **Washington Program**

The program in Washington is funded by a grant from the Office of Child Support Enforcement and is targeted at addressing arrearages of non-custodial parents who are currently incarcerated but who will eventually re-enter the workforce. Many inmates accumulate arrearages while in prison and have no means to pay these. Upon release, they often have difficulty obtaining employment, which can lead to higher arrearages.

This program takes three steps to address the issue. First, a modification of the child support order is sought. Second, employment assistance is provided to the released inmate. Finally, possible forgiveness of past debt is investigated.

Inmates are shown a video upon entering and leaving prison regarding custody issues and the possibility of modification of child support orders. Meetings are also held to discuss payment of child support as well as job training for the future.

To date, 1100 modification requests have been submitted and about 88 inmates are now transitioning from welfare to work. Funding for the initiative ends in July, 2003.

**Fresno County Model** - The county has an outreach program underway to the four prisons in the county - two institutions for males, two for females. Child support workers make monthly visits to educate new inmates on child support orders, custody issues, and modifications of orders. They try to educate parents about life after release, including women in prison who have lost custody. (Approximately 9000 women are incarcerated in California and 90% of these women have children). This project also offers employment and job training assistance after the release of the parents.

This program tries to take a holistic approach to assisting the parents. Program staff have information on a variety of approaches and strategies due to this individualized approach.

## **Session 4**

### **Fatherhood: Establishing a Fatherhood Program**

**Mr. Nigel Vann, National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership**

**Mr. Richard Silva, Sacramento Employment and Training Agency/Head Start**

To begin an effective fatherhood program, it is important for an agency to do a self-assessment. Mr. Vann explained that NPCL, in partnership with the National Head Start Association, has published "Father Friendliness Organizational Self-Assessment and Planning Tool." The seven categories to consider are:

1. Organizational Support - how much time is there in your organization for providing services to father/father figures?
2. Position and Reputation in Community - how does the community view the organization with respect to serving fathers/father figures?
3. Agency Policy and Procedures - are the organization's policies and procedures uniformly inclusive of fathers?
4. Staffing/Human Resources - how prepared are staff to provide services to fathers?
5. Program Services - has a program for fathers been clearly articulated?
6. Physical Environment - how inviting and welcoming is the physical environment for men and fathers?
7. Communication and Interaction - how are fathers treated and communicated with inside the agency?

After the assessment, it is possible to begin to identify action steps. Action steps include:

- Consider Best Practices
- Identify Program Funds
- Identify Key Staff
- Build Staff Commitment
- Identify Community Partners
- Conduct a Community Needs Assessment
- Identify Goals and Measurable Outcomes
- Define Program Components Linked to Outcomes
- Recruit Fathers
- Establish Key Collaborations

- Provide Service for Fathers
- Evaluate the Program
- Plan for Continuous Improvement

Mr. Silva identified the key elements in an effective father program. He emphasized that it is critical that the agency mission statement be clear and defined. Other elements included:

1. A strong organizational structure with men on the policy council.
2. Clearly defined, measurable and realistic, goals and outcomes.
3. Qualified, committed staff
4. A solid recruitment approach
5. Well-defined and tailored services
6. Strong collaborations with other community agencies
7. Efficient documentation and reporting procedures
8. Adequate and ongoing funding

## **Session 5**

### **Fatherhood Program Assessment Tools and Implementation**

**Randall Turner, National Fatherhood Institute**

Mr. Turner explained that father absence from the home is a serious social problem. Where the father is living outside the home, only 17% of children have seen their father in the last week. Over 80% have not seen their fathers in more than a week, with 40% not having seen their father in more than a year.

Few fatherhood programs around the country are focused on direct service. For a variety of reasons, including funding, developing a stand alone 501(c)(3) program is generally not as useful as developing a father friendly component as part of a larger family program such as Headstart.

Measuring fatherhood programs requires observation over time. Outcome data based on self-reporting is not adequate. Fatherhood programs may reduce other barriers to well being for the family.

There are many successful programs that now work with low-income fathers. Helping such fathers integrate into the family also means working with the mothers. It takes time for fathers to become strong supports for their families. Mr. Turner explained that, for some fathers with multiple problems, it can take four years.

Thousands of incarcerated fathers are released every day. Relationships with another male can help these men develop skills necessary to being good fathers. Supervised time with children is the beginning of a long process of rebuilding trust. The best way to measure progress is by noting the children's behavior.

# **Model Programs Track**

## **Session 1**

### **Focused Thinking - A Model Program**

**Stan Posthumus, Founder  
Focused Mediators, Inc.  
MSW, JD**

As a mediator, Mr. Posthumus has developed an approach to working with couples that results in a high level of reconciliation. People change their minds about divorce and learn to solve problems together. From 30-50% of his cases, generally couples well on their way through the legal process toward divorce, reconcile.

A key to his process is to clarify the meaning for each participant in the process. He asks many times "Are you saying. .." in order to ensure that there is clarity in communication.

Mr. Posthumus noted that every relationship must have recognition/respect, trust and communication in order to be successful. Good relationships demonstrate caring, loving and sharing, which are behaviors. The outcomes of a good relationship include understanding, empowerment and belonging.

His process clarifies the relationship, leads to recognition and respect of others, builds trust and strengthens listening.

Mr. Posthumus believes that the best mediator is almost invisible.

He noted that Albert Einstein said that we cannot solve the problems we face at the same level of thinking that created them. He believes that this is true for relationship problems, also, and that the mediation process must elevate couples to a higher level of thinking, a new way of seeing/hearing/perceiving, in order to solve complex problems.

## **Session 2**

### **Model Programs**

#### **Marriage Savers**

**Rev. Dr. Leroy Sullivan, Founder/Senior Pastor  
Bread of Life Outreach Ministry**

**Rev. Dr. Kevin Rowan, Associate Pastor  
Bread of Life Outreach Ministry**

## **Families Northwest**

**Jason Krafsky**

**<http://www.familiesnorthwest.org>**

### **Marriage Savers**

Marriage Savers is a faith-based program proven to be effective in strengthening marriages and lowering divorce rates. Marriage Savers builds on a national model developed by Mike and Harriet McManus. Dr. Sullivan described how his small, inner city congregation established a Community Marriage Covenant and joined with other churches and community leaders to strengthen marriage.

Marriage Savers builds on strengths in relationships, matching couples with similar lifestyles and challenges as mentors. This model is solution-oriented, building on strengths rather than deficits in a relationship. Mentor couples identified within the church community have strong marriages, have worked through difficulties and have a long-term commitment to marriage. Mentors are matched based on shared issues such as blended families, substance abuse or a special needs child. They support the couple over a long period of time, meeting in one another's homes. Mentor couples receive extensive training.

Dr. Sullivan is directly involved where there are identified issues around violence or abuse. There are strong confidentiality protections for the couples. Use of a premarital inventory predicts with 80% accuracy which couples are most likely to divorce.

Adopting the Marriage Savers model resulted in a 35% reduction in divorces within the community. Utilizing an inventory and mentors, 10% of the couples participating in this initiative chose not to marry. Only 5% of participating couples choose to divorce.

The program receives no government funds, and ultimately saves tax dollars through reduced dependence on government programs and enhanced community well-being.

## **Families Northwest**

Families Northwest works to strengthen and renew the marriage culture. In the United States, we are experiencing fragmentation of families at an unprecedented rate in any culture or civilization. The early 1980's reflected the highest number of divorces in the nation's history. The early 21<sup>st</sup> century reflects the highest number of children born out of wedlock, children raised by single parents, couples cohabiting outside of marriage and the lowest marriage/highest divorce rate.

Families Northwest is committed to increasing life-long marriages, the quantity and quality of time families spend together, and the percentage of children born, nurtured and raised by their married mother and father. They bring together church communities who pledge to "turn the tide" on marriage and reduce divorce and unmarried childbearing.

Families Northwest has collected and conducted research showing the value of marriage for healthy communities, and the negative "ripple-effect" that divorce and cohabiting produce in communities.

Factors indicating society wants a cultural change in line with the goals of Families Northwest include a general discontent with the social condition, people speaking out about the need for something to be done, emergence of formal organizations at the national level with leaders, policies and programs aimed at social and cultural change and emerging changes in culture, law and government policy.

To date, 700 churches serving 175 cities and towns in 18 Washington counties have adopted this goal.

An exercise involving the difficulty of breaking sticks in a bundle, versus the ease of breaking a single piece of wood, was used to illustrate the power and importance of community collaboration and partnerships to achieve goals and implement this vision.

### **Session 3**

#### **Becoming Parents Program**

**Pamela Jordan, Ph.D, R.N.**

<http://www.becomingparents.com>

This 27-hour program is focused on providing survival skills for couples making the transition to parenthood. Twenty-one hours of the classes are during pregnancy, with two 3 hour "booster" sessions, one when the baby is 6-8 weeks old and the final session when the baby is six months old.

The program provides first time parents with specific knowledge and skills for taking care of their couple relationship, taking care of themselves, relating to their baby and dealing with the many ways becoming parents impacts their lives.

Important information driving the need for such programs include:

- Research shows 80% of pregnancies are unplanned.
- 50% of new parent couples experience a moderate to severe decline in marital satisfaction
- 30% of couples experience depress
- 30% of couples experience marital distress
- 50% of couples have violent interaction

The program teaches parents specific communication skills, how to clarify roles and expectations, impacts of alcohol and physical violence in families, how to clarify values and beliefs, how to create a healthy lifestyle, child development and building support systems for the family.

Much of the Becoming Parents Program is contained in a book titled "Becoming Parents: How to Strengthen Your Marriage as Your Family Grows" by Jordan, P.L. Stanley, S.M. and H.J. Markman.

## **Relationships Track**

### **Session 1**

#### **Supporting Marriage in the Court System**

**Fred J DeJong, Ph.D, Professor/Applied Social Services researcher, Calvin College**

**John Crouch, Executive Director**

**Americans for Divorce Reform; divorce attorney**

#### **Strengthening Courthouse Marriages**

Dr. DeJong presented information about a program in the Greater Grand Rapids community aimed at reducing divorce and encouraging premarital preparation.

This program targets those who marry at the courthouse. Statistics show that those who marry in civil ceremonies tend to have fewer financial resources, less education, and more ethnic diversity than those who marry in religious ceremonies. In addition, they are more likely to be cohabiting at the time of marriage and are more likely to be divorced later.

Completion of a four hour workshop is now required in Judge Kelly's Kentwood District Court before a couple may be married. The program has expanded to other courts. Over 280 couples have completed the class since it began in 2000.

The class is offered frequently. Participants pay \$30.00 to attend. Experienced social workers serve as instructors. The curriculum includes: family of origin issues; managing money; relationship expectations; communication, gender, sex and intimacy; conflict resolution; and commitment. Class sizes are small - three couples on average. The majority of those who take the class report they feel better prepared for marriage and that they would recommend the class to a friend.

Key ingredients for success in this program include:

- Having a strong ally/advocate in the court
- Convenient times and locations of classes
- Having the class be a requirement in order to be married at the courthouse

Dr. DeJong sees opportunities to expand and improve the program through using a better researched program such as PREP as a basis, using an inventory approach, revising

materials to a lower education level, including a segment on cohabitation/marriage transition issues; and providing better education about marriage resources for future use.

## **Legal Responses to Divorce and Marriage**

John Crouch noted that we have a much better chance of reducing the overall harm done to children by divorce if we focus our efforts on trying to reduce divorce, rather than trying to improve it. Based on his practice, and years of observation of the system, he believes our capacity to further improve the divorce process is limited and most gains will come through reducing divorce.

Marriage education and reconciliation services could be provided through the Family Court system. Early on, this type of service was seen as part of the no-fault divorce laws in California but the resources to fully implement the services were never allocated to the levels expected. In the past decade, people in the family law field and court administration have come to embrace this concept, and no longer see the role of courts as a one track system from divorce filing to trial.

In order to strengthen marriage, information about premarital education could be offered and explained when couples apply for a marriage license. Regional lists of marriage education providers and websites could be put together for little cost. Marriage education information could be provided to people who file for legal separation or divorce.

The system could be changed to create a new kind of pleading to request help from the court by either party. This pleading could start a period of mandatory counseling.

## **Session 2**

### **Step Families**

**James H. Bray, Ph.D.**

This session examined the many different constellations and arrangements that can work in step-families. Dr. Bray emphasized that there is no magic plan or arrangement that will address all the challenges, diversity and variety found in step-families.

Dr. Bray noted that a number of factors are important to look at related to step-families:

1. Most step-parents are fathers.
2. There are lots of names for step-parenting.
3. Planning for remarriage is important.
4. Parenting is the number one stressor in every remarriage. Children have a huge impact on the success or failure of remarriages.
5. Step parents are most successful if they avoid disciplining step-children for a full year.

There are three categories of remarriage - each has different characteristics and each can work. These categories are the neo-traditional (like a traditional marriage); the matriarchal (Mom wants a husband but not a father to her children. She expects to do the parenting); and the romantic (partners often have unrealistic expectations and this is the most divorce prone of the three).

Dr. Bray's advice for dealing with remarriage:

1. Develop a parenting plan before marriage. Talk about it!
2. Deal with change. It is inevitable. Talk about it!
3. Involve the non-custodial parent.
4. Work harder than in the first marriage on adult relationships. This couple had no time to get to know each other before the kids.
5. Deal with money issues. Talk about it!

Dr. Bray has written a book on step-families entitled “*Stepfamilies: Love, Marriage and Parenting in the First Decade.*”

### **Session 3**

## **Family Wellness Program**

### **Jo Velasquez, Ph.D.**

Family wellness depends on families recognizing and responding successfully to a number of stages and challenges. Dr. Velasquez outlined the stages of change and challenge in a relationship:

1. Honeymoon-Commitment- Everything is wonderful and close. The challenge is to enjoy it.
2. Accommodation/Censoring - Begin to notice differences and disagreements, but don't talk about them. Couple are afraid to hurt each other. The challenge is to figure out how to be two different people together.
3. Assessment - Each member of the couple is doing things separately. Each needs time, space, friends and rewards apart from each other. The challenge is to have independent activities without putting too much strain on the relationship. This stage leads to either decision to separate or recommit.
4. Recommitment - The couple work out how to be separate and together, both. The challenge is to keep the balance between togetherness and separateness.

Dr. Velasquez noted that it is important for couples to take the time to identify their individual goals, interests, friendships and dreams, as well as those elements for the couple.

Communication is critical. Partners must know what they need and want and be able to say it. Working toward solutions that work for both members of the couple is important. Couples who are able to develop strong listening skills will find communication much better.

## **Session 4**

### **Relationship Enhancement - Marriage Strengthening Initiatives**

**Bill Coffin, Administration for Children and Families**

**United States Department of Health and Human Services**

Mr. Coffin explained how the Love-Anger cycle causes couples difficulty. Most people look to a relationship to provide intimacy but there are more differences than expected and couples don't always know how to deal with their differences. Information from the PREP program was presented to show how the course can help couples deal with their differences and the difficulties of intimacy.

Communication, commitment and resolution are key to the PREP course. According to the Oklahoma Marriage Survey, one can expect that only 25% of couples will have good communication, ongoing commitment and the ability to deal creatively with conflict.

Two Catholic parishes were surveyed and the following areas were identified by marriage couples as problem areas:

- Lack of tenderness
- Frequent fault finding
- Nagging
- Problems with in-depth communication
- Lack of romance
- Feeling used or unappreciated

There are eight characteristics that are indicative of a healthy bond and are applicable to most couples:

1. Power is shared.
2. Strong marital bond, balance of closeness and autonomy
3. Interest in each other's thoughts and feelings
4. Expression of feelings encouraged
5. Inevitable conflicts that occur do not escalate
6. Problem solving skills are well developed
7. Most basic values are shared

8. The ability to deal with differences

## **Session 5**

### **The Gottman Method- The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work**

**Gina Delmastro, The Gottman Institute**

Ms. Delmastro reviewed how research at the University of Washington "Love Lab" has enabled social scientists to predict which couples will divorce with 90% accuracy.

The components that predict divorce include a ratio of less than 5 positive statements for each negative statement exchanged by the couple. In addition, "The Four Horsemen" of relationship discord are key to predicting outcomes for couples. The Four Horsemen are:

- 1.) Criticism - couples complain with blame or see partner as having character flaw.
- 2.) Defensiveness - there is a denial of responsibility by couples, or "marital whine".
- 3.) Contempt - the best predictor of divorce, there are direct or indirect expressions of contempt.
- 4.) Stonewalling - In 85% of the cases, men are the stonewallers and close up in interactions.

Key indicators of relationship success are a woman's ability to bring up issues with a "soft start", an entry that does not include blame or criticism, and a man's ability to accept the influence of their wife. These two traits were critical to relationship success.

Ms. Delmastro discussed the importance of "flooding" as it relates to marital discord. When "flooding" takes place, the partners are overwhelmed with the other's complaints. This triggers a reaction with the heart rate rising above 100, resulting in a fight or flight reaction. The body is overwhelmed and can take 20 minutes to defuse this reaction. Chronic flooding, with a heart rate at 17 beats per minute higher at rest - predicts divorce. When the body is in a hyper-vigilant state, it has pronounced health impacts.

The seven principles for making marriage work are:

- 1.) Enhance "Love Maps" .
- 2.) Nurture fondness and admiration .
- 3.) Turn toward bids for attention.
- 4.) Accept influence of your partner, especially your wife.
- 5.) Resolve "resolvable" problems and bring them up softly.
- 6.) Overcome "gridlock" of perpetual problems .
- 7.) Create shared meaning.

## Conference Evaluation

This conference was very well attended. There was some overcrowding at the conference due to an effort to accommodate as many people as possible who expected to be able to register on site. It is a sign of the interest in this topic that the conference was a "sell out".

Overall, 80% of the attendees responding to the evaluation rated the conference as a whole a 4 or a 5 on a scale of 5, where one was the lowest and 5 the highest.

Many participants commented that they were inspired by the energy, conviction and insights of the opening plenary speakers. Overall, there was support for the emphasis on marriage and faith. However, other conference attendees commented that the opening sessions tended to oversimplify complex problems and questioned the focus on marriage and faith.

The conference's theme of "strengthening families" and the emphasis on relationship-building received near universal praise. The fatherhood component was cited most often as the single most helpful track.

Attendees were generally pleased with the number of new ideas they were bringing home with them, and said they had greater insight into issues and a better idea of how to proceed. Some said there should have been more emphasis on practical applications, including ways government can support local programs and collaborations.

Opportunities for networking and resource-gathering were mentioned often as a particular benefit of the conference. A number of Native American attendees expressed appreciation for the inclusion of Native American speakers.

Overcrowding was a problem and came up fairly often - chairs were "too close together" at the plenary and breakout sessions and there were sometimes not enough handouts available. The registration process was described as "confused" by a number of respondents.

Many said the conference was too short and should have lasted at least another day. Others would have liked to have audio tapes of sessions they could not attend.