

**ACF RAPID RESPONSE COLORADO
STRENGTHENING FAMILIES
CONFERENCE**

**Rapid Response Technical Assistance
Project**

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I. INTRODUCTION

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It is families that are the first to take care of a sick relative, come to the rescue of a member in need, take care of their children, and look after the elderly. Families do these things naturally out of love, loyalty, and commitment to the future. They are the foundation of our society.

– Governor Bill Owens

Governor Bill Owens wrote these words in his letter welcoming participants to the Colorado Strengthening Families Conference held September 18 and 19, 2002, in Denver, CO. The Colorado Strengthening Families Conference was intended “to serve as an opportunity for leaders in the State to come together to share research, strategies, and programs that foster healthy families and promote long-term success in life and work.” In the future, the State plans to offer smaller versions of this conference in various locations around the State.

While welfare reform in Colorado has been generally successful and innovative, government and community programs and partnerships have moved many families to self-sufficiency, State leaders recognized that supporting the long-term success of all of Colorado’s families will require continued innovation and strong programmatic partnerships. These leaders wanted to answer questions such as:

- What partnerships and best practices are necessary to strengthen Colorado’s families?
- How do strong families improve Colorado’s economy?
- Why should government promote healthy marriages?

Conference planners envisioned a meeting where “policymakers from different community sectors statewide” could come together “to examine the socioeconomic factors affecting Colorado families and to identify strategies for addressing these questions.”¹ Approximately 350 people attended the 2-day meeting. The agenda (Appendix A), was developed by a steering committee of more than 30 agencies and organizations.

¹ Colorado Strengthening Families Conference Participant Packet. Available on-line: http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/oss/str_families/Invitation2.pdf. Accessed: October 10, 2002.

**COLORADO STRENGTHENING FAMILIES CONFERENCE
STEERING COMMITTEE PARTICIPANTS**

American Clergy Leadership Council (ACLC)	Colorado Muslim Society
American Family Coalition (AFC)	Community Colleges and Occupational Educational Services
Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Denver	Daniels Fund
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints	Denver Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
Colorado Department of Education	Denver Seminary
Colorado Department of Human Services	Family Resource Center Association, Inc.
Colorado Department of Labor and Employment	Family Time Foundation
Colorado Department of Local Affairs	Greater Metro Denver Ministerial Alliance
Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment	Iiff School of Theology
Colorado Department of Public Safety	The Islamic Center of Ahl-Al-Beit
Colorado Division of Criminal Justice	Lutheran Family Services of Colorado
Colorado Association of Nonprofit Organizations (CANPO)	National Conference of State Legislators
Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence	Office of First Lady Frances Owens
Colorado Counties, Inc. (CCI)	Office of Governor Bill Owens
Colorado Foundation for Families and Children	Policy Studies, Inc.
Colorado Legal Services	Rocky Mountain Family Council
	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

The remainder of this report is in two sections: Lessons Learned, and Conference Reflections. Appendix A contains the agenda and Appendix B the evaluation summary.

II. LESSONS LEARNED

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Organizers of the Colorado Strengthening Families Conference have a vision for hosting policy development and capacity building meetings of this type all across Colorado. In order to inform their efforts for future meetings, this section presents some key lessons learned regarding the planning and implementation of Strengthening Families Conferences.

Philosophy Matters

A wide variety of people are committed to the idea of strong and healthy families. These family advocates come from all sectors of public and private life, and every political affiliation and economic strata. Given the eclectic nature of this cohort, it is not surprising that wide philosophical variation exists regarding the best ways to serve and strengthen families.

Future conferences must be built on the understanding that people are of very different mindsets regarding the strengthening families initiative. It is further recognized that communities throughout the State are at varying stages of implementation concerning family strengthening efforts. Regional conference planners may want to consider hosting conferences based on identified needs within their communities, thus allowing for a more tailored experience likely to meet the needs of all participants.

Location Matters

Colorado is a very diverse state. Conference participants represented many of Colorado's counties and localities, but some expressed concern over the lack of access to meetings and resources felt by more rural or removed areas. In order to reach conferences and meetings, some participants are faced with an arduous amount of travel and expense.

Regional conference planners should consider access issues and locate their meetings in areas that are reachable through reasonable effort on the part of potential participants. In addition to increasing the likelihood of high attendance from remote areas, this strategy is likely to engender perceptions of inclusion on the part of the participants. That is, if the meeting is held near to where they live and work, they will likely perceive the proceedings as more relevant and important to them and the families they serve.

Collaboration Matters

As evidenced by the variety of agencies and organizations represented at this conference, many different people have a vested interest in strengthening families. While people approach this topic with different ideas, concerns, and philosophies, working together is the best way to meet the needs of families. One strategy for bringing voices together is the use of a steering committee, as was done by the planners of this initial conference. Whatever strategy is used to bridge the differences in the community, voices that are truly representative of the communities for which conferences are being planned must be included.

This initiative will be most successful when it engages and involves all the diverse voices that surround it. While the issues involved often provoke highly disparate positions, considerate and civil dialogue and active listening will draw the best ideas from all. Future conferences should endeavor to include voices representing various positions and beliefs about marriage, faith, and fatherhood programs, as well as various faiths, ethnic groups, and family types.

Community Orientation Matters

Faith- and community-based organizations have particular strengths and, in many cases, advantages over their government partners in serving and strengthening families. Faith-based organizations are a major, multi-generational organization in virtually every town in America, and Colorado in particular. Families often feel more comfortable accessing services in a local church, synagogue, mosque, or community center than in a local Department of Human Services office. Effectively responding to the particular needs and concerns of clients is an important step in strengthening families.

Faith- and community-based organizations have an essential role to play in providing services and support to families. They are also invaluable partners in framing the dialogue around the strengthening families initiative. Faith- and community-based social service providers must be included in directing, organizing, and executing future conferences. The inclusion of these representatives not only results in a highly informed meeting agenda, but increases the relevance of the meeting to people associated with these groups. Participants will be more likely to value the meeting when someone they trust (e.g., a Rabbi or community leader) is prominently and visibly involved in the planning process.

Research Matters

Misinformation about strengthening families and the role of faith-based organizations in providing social services is still a reality for many potential participants. This misinformation can be corrected with informed dialogue and empirically based research. Clearly defining terms and objectives will enable participants to find ground common.

Education Matters

The best research is wasted in the absence of effective outreach and education campaigns. Everyone, from government officials to service providers to clients need educational materials and campaigns that “speak their language” and bring the healthy families initiative into clearer focus for them.

Conference organizers should take the time to bring all participants to a common set of terms. While words like “marriage,” “healthy marriage,” “family formation,” and “family stabilization” are used interchangeably, reasonable differences of opinion about what these words actually mean should be expected. Further, some terms carry a more “loaded” set of connotations than others and should be avoided. It is important to provide education to partners as well as to capitalize on the opportunity to learn from them about which terms are concerned taboo in their communities.

III. CONFERENCE REFLECTIONS

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The Colorado Strengthening Families agenda included a host of speakers with information on research, best practices, and innovative collaboration strategies for supporting healthy families. In addition, several organizations had representatives on hand and distributed literature. This section offers brief descriptions of each speaker's presentation and concludes with a list of the conference exhibitors. This information will allow future conference planners to develop a sense of the type of information available to them and, even if these presenters themselves are not available, the overviews will provide a picture of the type of speakers planners may wish to include.

Conference Presentations

The Conference opened with remarks from **Colorado Governor Bill Owens**. Governor Owens described the Conference as an opportunity to ensure a bright future for the children of Colorado. He applauded efforts to defend and strengthen the family, calling family the “heartbeat of a loving home.” Governor Owens said that we can't replace families nor replicate their value; therefore, we must support, defend, strengthen, and enhance them. Governor Owens argued that with a common-sense approach and a healthy measure of respect, we can draw on the inherent power of families and work together to ensure every child knows the joy and love of a healthy family.

Following Governor Owens, **Dr. Wade Horn**, Assistant Secretary for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, addressed the conference participants. Dr. Horn began his remarks by defining his role as father as the most important thing he can do, the title “dad” being more valuable to him than any other. Trained as a child psychologist, Dr. Horn is primarily concerned with the negative impacts broken homes have on children. One-third of all US children live in a home absent a father, and of these, 40 percent have not seen their fathers in more than one year, and 50 percent have never set foot in their father's home. Children growing up without their father are more likely to experience negative outcomes. In fact, father absence has been associated with all manner of negative child well-being outcomes, including greater likelihood of poverty, increased risk of drug use, poorer health, lower employment, more problematic behaviors in school and at home, increased risk of abuse, and an increased involvement in crime.

Dr. Horn made several recommendations regarding strengthening fathers and families.

- **Broaden our understanding of child support enforcement.** The financial aspects of child support are essential, but not solitary. Children need their fathers involved in all aspects of their well-being—financial, emotional, academic, and psychological. Dr. Horn applauded TANF pass-through legislation where child support collected for families receiving TANF does not go to the State to reimburse them for TANF costs, but is “passed through” to the family. Research shows this program to be effective, at least in part, because fathers know the money they pay is reaching their children.

- **Support incarcerated parents.** There are many reasons why parents are absent from their children’s homes. One is incarceration. Dr. Horn has proposed \$25 million to support connections between children and their incarcerated parents. The program will develop parenting skills and foster connections for families for whom reunification and involvement is appropriate. In cases where it is not appropriate, mentoring programs will provide children with the role models they need.

- **Dispel myths about the healthy families movement.** Dr. Horn spent some time discussing what this movement is not about. Healthy marriages and families are not about compelling or coercing people to get married, forcing people to stay in abusive or dangerous marriages, government matchmaking, or the withdrawal of support from single parents. Rather, he argues, the movement is about three principles:
 - **Healthy marriage.** The emphasis in this principle is on health. The objective should be the support and encouragement of healthy marriages by offering programs designed to develop the skills couples require to be successful.

 - **Non-neutrality.** Government should not be neutral about marriage. Government has a history of supporting life choices shown to have positive impacts. For example, the government supports home ownership because research indicates home owners are more invested in their communities; and in communities where a higher proportion of residents own their homes, challenges such as crime, vandalism, and juvenile delinquency are greatly reduced. Likewise, research indicates that married people and their children are better off in many dimensions. The government should not make the choice for people to get married, but it should be ready to support those who do make that choice.

 - **Action.** Dr. Horn argues that we “can not be paralyzed by imperfect information.” That is, we don’t know everything there is to know about the marriage movement. But, we do know some things and we should be ready to move ahead with programs that have a reasonable history of success.

In conclusion, Dr. Horn offered a principle he felt should guide all policy and programmatic decisions: Start with the child. Ask yourself, ‘What does *this* child need?’

Dr. Horn was followed by **Dr. Will Miller**, author of *Refrigerator Rights: Creating Connections and Restoring Relationships*. Dr. Miller brought a humorous, thought-provoking look at the cost of social isolation on individuals. His book and presentation focus on the lack of meaningful, connected relationships in the lives of most Americans. He calls these relationships “Refrigerator Rights relationships,” those where each person would feel comfortable going to visit the other and helping themselves to whatever was in the refrigerator—much like one would do with one’s family. Dr. Miller argues that our modern “pop” culture is to blame for much of this level of disconnect. Between 15 and 17 percent of people relocate every year, and two-thirds of people in their twenties relocate in any given year. In addition to relocation, Dr. Miller blames television for this solitude, noting that more homes in this country have television than flush plumbing. Further, he cited the following TV statistics:

- Americans watch an average of 22 hours of television each week
- 60 percent of children watch more than two hours every day
- two-thirds of Americans have a television in the bedroom
- One-quarter of American families watch television while eating dinner.
- Dr. Miller describes television as “an overwhelming distraction” from the necessary life pattern of “affirmation and correction.” This life pattern, where people with whom we are sufficiently bonded can affirm and correct us, leads to a loss of “temperamental capability.” That is, because we lack the type of relationships in which our friends feel empowered to help us identify and modify negative behaviors or actions, we operate without a gauge of our interactions with others. The ultimate message is that relationships are important and they take time, effort, and commitment to develop and sustain.

Bishop José Gomez next offered the strategies that inform the marriage preparation services offered by the Archdiocese of Denver. Bishop Gomez discussed the historical commitment of the Church to marriage, noting that the first miracle of Jesus Christ was at a wedding feast. The Archdiocese views its mission as a chance to “restore God’s plan for the sanctity of marriage.” The Archdiocese believes that the path of the family is the path of society—that the “future of humanity passes by way of the family.” The objective of the faith-based marriage preparation program is to equip couples with the tools they need to be successful. If couples expect an “authentic marriage,” we must first equip them with “the skills and tools they need to be successful.”

After the presentation from Bishop Gomez, **Scott Stanley, Ph.D.**, co-director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver, spoke about his research on attitudes and impacts of marriage. Dr. Stanley's presentation was guided by three themes:

- **The vast majority of Americans, of all income levels, want healthy, stable marriages.** Eighty-five percent of Americans will marry. This statistic holds true across income levels.
- **When chosen, the benefits of healthy marriages accrue to the couple and to society.** Research has shown marriage to be positively correlated with earning more money, improved health, greater overall happiness, and emotional health.
- **Marriages can be successful.** Dr. Stanley offered three life choices statistically linked with fewer divorces: finishing high school, having no children prior to marriage, and marrying after age 20.

Generally, because most people desire and benefit from marriage, it makes sense to offer the supports which make the dream more attainable to more people. However, to do this, one must first be clear about what the marriage initiative is not. Dr. Stanley is NOT claiming that:

- Everyone benefits from every marriage.
- Everyone can or will find a suitable partners.
- People should always stay married, regardless of the circumstances.
- Everyone should get married, either by choice or by coercion.
- Having a marriage is more important than basic life supports, like food.

Stanley paradoxically quipped, “We could prevent all divorces, simply by banning marriage.” However, he went on to explain that in reality it takes thoughtful, effective divorce prevention to increase American's confidence that long-term, healthy and stable marriages are possible, an increased understanding of the benefits of these types of marriages, better skills at choosing and living with an appropriate partner, an increase in the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be a good mate, and a reduction in the policies that discourage marriage. Most of these things can be addressed via premarital education. Dr. Stanley's research suggests that most people, regardless of demographics, think premarital education of some type is beneficial.

Dr. Stanley cited what he considers to be best practices in premarital education:

- Content is research-based.
- Programs are evaluated.
- Methods are regularly updated.
- By using these best practices, premarital educators can expect increased relational confidence and ability, lowering of many risk factors, improved choices (including the decision of some high-risk couples not to marry), better understanding of what are reasonable expectations about marriage, and an increase in father involvement regardless of the decision to marry.

Panel—Marriage Initiatives

Michigan State Representative **Doug Hart** described the Effective Fragile Families Initiative in his State. This initiative is a “long-term game plan” built on prevention, support, training (budgeting, parenting skills), incentives, child care, and transportation. The training curriculum is delivered in 24 hours of classes offered during lunch, dinner, and other non-traditional times to facilitate greater access.

Arizona State Representative **Mark Anderson** discussed the strategies and funding streams available to support fragile families in his State. High school curriculum includes marriage and communication skills. The program began in public high schools, but a Governor’s Commission is working on implementation to ensure greater community access to it. Arizona has invested \$1 million in TANF funding for the project. An additional \$75,000 has been allocated to the development of a marriage skills handbook, and vouchers for services, with a 15 percent co-payment. The State found that even after these programs were in place, they needed better outreach and marketing to increase utilization. They contracted out this function. Students are asked to rate their experience in the programs on a scale of 1 to 5, with the average score being a 4.5.

Theodora Ooms of the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) described the ways in which family formation and stabilization can be a part of what she calls a “progressive agenda,” which is embraced by liberal constituents. By understanding that most people want to be married and that, for the most part, marriage is good for them, our responsibility becomes developing ways to support the development of healthy marriages. Ms. Ooms’ research indicates that prevention of divorce and strengthening families through skill building is more

effective than using monetary incentives. Ms. Ooms referred participants to the CLASP Policy Brief, *Marriage and Government: Strange Bedfellows?*, available at http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1028563059.86/Marriage_Brief1.pdf.

Glen Stanton, spoke about the resources available through his organization, Focus on the Family. These resources, something of a marriage toolkit, are available at www.family.org and include such topics as:

- Cohabitation
- Dating and courtship
- Marital expectations
- Preparing for marriage
- Purity/boundaries
- Communication
- In-law relationships
- Long-term marriage
- Managing anger
- Ministry couples
- Roles in marriage
- Spiritual growth for couples

Reverend Robert Woolfolk of the Agape Christian Church described his program's efforts to keep families together by using safe home environments as a base. Families need safe, affordable housing, budgeting skills, and marriage skills. Efforts will only be successful if we work with real people in real neighborhoods. Doing so builds the confidence of the families which, ultimately, increases their likelihood of success. Family and spiritual education and skill building are important. The Agape Christian Church offers families employment, supplemental income, training, health care, and family mentoring.

Colorado's First Lady **Frances Owens** called the family “the first, and best, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.” Her vision for the future State forums on family wants and needs is one of geographic variation that embraces all types of families.

Maria Guajardo Lucero, Ph.D., couches her understanding of healthy families and marriages in an understanding of building on strengths—strength of self, strength of family, and strength of vision. Dr. Lucero avoids the term “at-risk,” because so many families fit the clinical profile, but have wonderful skills and strengths that can be used to support their marriages and children. One function of family life is to support the individual success of each member. Dr. Lucero also discussed the importance of the 40 developmental assets of children and encouraged anyone interested in working to strengthen families and communities to ensure children have access to as many of these assets as possible. Children also need access to what Dr. Lucero calls “asset building champions.” These champions are adults who, in addition to parents, support children and offer them positive role models. The job of children, according to Dr. Lucero, is to learn about people by being around adults. Adults' job, then, is to make sure the lessons taught to them are positive ones.

Amy Stephens, Director of Fresh Ideas Communications and Consulting, works to engage the imaginations of young people, to keep abstinence-until-marriage education alive and interesting. Ms. Stephens advocates for young people to be successful by offering the following principles:

- Abstinence until marriage is the best social and health message. We should implement policies that support it.
- States should endorse marriage covenants and implement divorce reform.
- Parents should be involved in sexual education efforts.
- We must offer young people an unambiguous message and include abstinence until marriage as part of a larger character development message.
- Support marriage and relationship pilot programs and innovations to promote healthy marriage.

William Moloney, Ph.D., Commissioner of the Colorado Department of Education, works with Early and Family Literacy Programs. Dr. Moloney describes “closing the achievement gap as a moral imperative.” Education reform needs “radical simplification.” The education arena is an appropriate partner in the strengthening families initiative because “we can't do ‘no child left

behind' without no family left behind.' A thoughtful dialogue will go a long way to answering the urgent debate of national identity.

Patrick Fagan, The William FitzGerald Fellow in Family and Culture Issues at The Heritage Foundation, presented data indicating the value of strong marriages in increasing the overall socioeconomic and health well-being of families and children. Based on Fagan's compilation of data, "the erosion of marriage has created enormous difficulties for children, parents, and society. Today, one child in three is born out of wedlock. Compared to children born within marriage, children born outside of marriage are overwhelmingly more likely to live in poverty, depend on welfare, and have behavior problems. They are also more likely to suffer depression and physical abuse, fail in school, abuse drugs, and end up in jail." According to Fagan, strategies to strengthen marriages, for those who choose marriage, will have high impact on the health and well-being of families and communities.

Dr. Ron Mincy, Professor of Social Policy and Social Work Practice at Columbia University, commented on the relationship between changing views of the family and changing family policy. The family is the fundamental institution responsible for providing interdependence (before public aid), and for raising children, which consists of developing moral and religious values and providing a set of skills. Historically, children were removed from poor families because poverty was considered a situation indicative of parental failure. Today, this is no longer the predominant philosophy, and the value of strong parent-child bonds is better understood.

Dr. Mincy's research indicates that children have more contact with both parents while they are very young, but that over time, father absence increases. This early connection indicates a need to offer social services to families early, before divorce becomes imminent. We must recognize and support families of all types because marriage has positive impacts for both children and parents. For children born into married families, there is an increase in marriage rate and a decrease in unwed births. There is also an increase in the proportion of children who will remain in married families (a positive cyclical effect), and an increase in the proportion of parents who eventually marry. For married parents, there are better outcomes in education, substance abuse, employment, and earnings.

Bobby Polito, Director of the Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Director of the Compassion Capital Fund, discussed the role of faith-based organizations in supporting the development of healthy families. The objective, according to Mr. Polito, is to determine which programs work best with faith-

based providers (e.g., Welfare, Head Start) and to bridge the gap between these programs and the resources they need to keep working. The Compassion Capital Fund will support the development of “honest brokers”—intermediaries to bridge the gap between small faith-based providers and Federal funding agencies.

Panel—Government Collaboration with Faith- and Community-based Organizations

Ovetta Sampson, of America’s Family, Inc., described her organization as being in the “attitude adjustment business.” America’s Family attempts to use employers to link clients with transportation, education, health care, child care, housing, and knowledge and training with respect to technology useful in locating better employment. They try to bridge the gap between employer and employee in language and pace. America’s Family uses an on-line program as a behavior change model. Clients are encouraged to access the course at work. They work with clients to develop language skills that will allow them to communicate better with employers.

Pat Haskell, of the Center for Independence, offers “opportunities for people with disabilities of all ages.” They offer services such as information and referral, advocacy, and peer counseling. Working with the U.S. Department of Labor Education and Training Administration (DOLETA) Consumer Navigation Program, they provide disability support and benefit systems. Partnering with the government to “help the helpers” provides several important benefits: understanding the history, working with the trenches, and establishing an individual response, prevents clients from “falling through the cracks,” facilitates advocacy, engenders trust, and stretches money further.

The Heritage Christian Center of Arapahoe County, represented by Executive Pastor **Larry Russell**, has between 10 and 12 thousand members. They have several programs, including a prison ministry operated in partnership with the Department of Corrections, a community outreach program that includes sports, community activities, English as a Second Language (ESL) and tutoring classes, a homeless shelter, holiday outreach, and a food support program.

The prison ministry is open to all faiths and cultures and operates satellite dishes in all prisons in the State (4 Federal, 1 INS detention facility, 24 State facilities, 2 halfway houses and 2 youth detention facilities). During incarceration, they operate a family support group which provides counseling to families. At the time of release, the chaplain makes a list of needs with the inmate and provides support to the newly released. For example, they pick up the inmate and

provide a backpack with housing information, clothing and bus tokens, and will help with acquiring tools or other supplies needed to find work.

The Heritage Christian Center attempts to respond to the needs of their community. When clients needed help with transitional housing, they purchased a 200-room hotel where clients can stay and get a free meal at night. Food programs invest approximately \$200,000 annually, and provide about 300 families with food every week.

Teva Sienicki, of the Interfaith Hospitality Network, described her program's efforts to support healthy families. The Interfaith Hospitality Network provides shelter, meals, and compassionate assistance. Their Shelter Network rotates through 11 host churches and one hospital. Each week, the host site changes, but the day site remains the same. A 15-passenger van transports families between the locations. Volunteers from each of the host sites cook and offer tutoring and mentoring services. The model, in which families remain together, is better for kids who remain with their parents and have limited contact with more dangerous behaviors sometimes present in other shelter environments. The program is, according to Ms. Sienicki, "safer, warmer, and less scary."

Seven days a week, the Interfaith Hospitality Network offers information and referral services to call- and walk-in clients. They partner with the County for direct housing assistance. Ninety-two percent of people they've helped with housing have remained in that housing for at least three months.

Interfaith has three important characteristics. First, they have respect for all faiths and political perspectives. This attitude leads to more openness to all clients. Second, they have an enhanced relationship with different levels of government, which leads to an increased number of referrals. Lastly, they have more points of entry than traditional government services and their nongovernmental status tends to engender more trust in potential clients who have a fear of government services.

Conference Exhibitors

In addition to these speakers, conference exhibitors included:

Be A Fan of Your Kid (Children's Hospital)
Colorado Abstinence Education Program
Colorado Association of Nonprofit Organizations

Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Colorado Department of Human Services

Colorado Foundation for Families and Children

Family Time Foundation

Jewish Family Services

National Child Care Information Center

National Fatherhood Initiative

Oklahoma Marriage Initiative

Policy Studies, Inc

U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services., Administration for Children and Families Region VIII

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Next Steps

The Colorado Strengthening Families Conference was the first step in a continuum of efforts to open dialogue about various issues pertinent to strengthening families. The next step is for communities to take the information provided through this State conference, develop community-based collaborations, and implement regional conferences similar to this event to inform and motivate regional policy makers to begin developing systems for strengthening families. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families and the Colorado Department of Human Services, along with myriad other supporting organizations, will work with local communities in the upcoming year to help convene steering committees, provide technical assistance, and provide financial resources, as available, to help launch regional strengthening families conferences designed to encourage communities to address the issues pertinent to supporting families for the well-being of the children, their families and the community.

APPENDIX A:
AGENDA

1.

**APPENDIX B:
EVALUATION SUMMARY**

EVALUATION SUMMARY

PARTICIPANT AFFILIATION	
Governmental	27
NonProfit	28
Community-based Organization	8
Faith-based Organization	14
Business	2
Other & No Answer	5

ISSUES OF CONCERN	
Issue	Percent of responses[*]
The Role of Fathers in Strengthening Families	15%
Assets for Colorado Youth and Positive Youth Development	14%
Collaboration Strategies within the Community	14%
Community-based and Faith-based Initiatives and Contracting	12%
Federal Priorities Concerning Families, Marriage, and Fatherhood	10%
PREP	10%
Marriage Preparation Enrichment Programs in a Faith-based Environment	9%
Reduction of Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancies Programs and Strategies	9%
Family and Early Literacy	6%

* Respondents were asked for any “other” issues of concern. These responses are not included in above calculations, but are presented below.

* Because respondents were allowed to choose multiple responses, these figures do not add up to 100%.

Other issues of concern cited by respondents included:

- Adoption exchange network
- Marketing strategies
- Employer/government/community partnerships
- Food security
- Strengthening non-traditional families
- Strengthening families with significant barriers (e.g., developmental disabilities)
- Successful models for “empowering families”

- Using TANF money for abstinence education, promotion of marriage, and reduction of out-of-wedlock births
- Divorce reform
- Comprehensive sex education
- Vouchers (especially for faith-based services)
- Natural family planning
- Domestic violence
- Grant availability.

In your opinion, what are the three greatest needs to effectively strengthen families in your community?

- Abstinence education (6 responses)
- Appreciate diversity (7)
- Better wages and flexible work schedules (7)
- Character building (5)
- Community engagement in “one night off a week” programs (1)
- Conflict resolution (2)
- Connect families to resources (3)
- Culture change (3)
- Domestic violence prevention (2)
- Employment (1)
- English language classes (1)
- Financial issues around faith-based organizations working with government (2)
- Friendship as a foundation for marriage (1)
- Funding (8)

- Leadership (3)
- Long-term support to all families (1)
- Marriage mentoring programs (4)
- Marriage preparation (5)
- Natural family planning (1)
- Open, honest dialogue (1)
- Organizational development for service providers (1)
- Outreach and marketing (1)
- Parenting education (5)
- Relationship education and counseling (15)
- Research (2)
- Responsible fatherhood programs (1)
- Services for self-sufficiency (housing, jobs, transportation, child care) (21)
- Substance abuse treatment and prevention services (3)
- Tax incentives to help families who choose to have one parent stay at home with children (1)
- The relationship between sex, children, and marriage (1).

Additional comments and recommendations:

- Domestic violence concerns were overlooked.
- All faiths were not represented. There was a bias toward Christian faiths. Diverse voices must be included, heard, and respectfully considered because we all care about families and children. Faith-based presentations were not comprehensive. No one addressed drawbacks.
- I was tremendously impressed with the quality of the presenters both days and it was a wonderful experience hearing from leaders and policymakers on these topics. I think it is important to value non-traditional families of all types. It is great for us to hear from national leaders about what works to strengthen families.

- Needed time for questions and answers. Networking would be facilitated by nametags which include participants' affiliations. We need a list of participants. Also, presentations during lunch took away from a valuable networking opportunity. We need opportunities to talk and listen to each other. Workshops and breakout sessions allow for more dialogue.