



OKLAHOMA

Marriage Initiative Workshop

THE WELFARE PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK

Technical Assistance Report

**JULY 15 - 16, 2003
OKLAHOMA CITY, OK**

THIS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REPORT WAS PREPARED BY CHANDRA ROBINSON, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COORDINATOR FOR AFYA, INC. AFYA, INC., IS THE CONTRACTOR FOR THE WELFARE PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (TA) NETWORK. THE WELFARE PEER TA NETWORK IS A FEDERAL INITIATIVE THAT HIGHLIGHTS THE GOOD WORK OF OTHER STATES, TRIBES, AND COUNTIES. THIS EFFORT PROVIDES THEM WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER THOROUGH PEER-TO-PEER INFORMATION SHARING AMONG STATES, TRIBES, AND COMMUNITIES.

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Workshop Background

Oklahoma serves as one of the premiere pioneers in implementing State efforts to promote, enhance, and maintain the development of healthy marriages. What began as a need to reduce the Oklahoma divorce rate and the number of out-of-wedlock births, has now evolved into a major initiative benefiting families, neighborhoods, and communities. The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI) is a Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funded, public/private partnership dedicated to reducing the State's divorce rate, strengthening families, and reducing government support dependence. With the development of the OMI, Oklahoma has generated attention from several other States considering their own options regarding healthy marriage promotion. These States recognize the need for Federal and State guidance to assist their program development process. It was within this context that the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance (TA) Network received a TA request from Riverside, California, whose officials outlined a specific need to bring a delegation to Oklahoma City for a fact finding mission. Upon initial conversations, it became increasingly clear that other States would also regard the event beneficial and answer many questions on developing a marriage initiative.

The Welfare Peer TA Network sponsored a multi-State TA event on July 15-16, 2003, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. This event was co-coordinated with Public Strategies, the public relations firm that manages the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative. The Administration for Children and Families' Region VI, VII and IX Offices provided additional support, ensuring this event met

State informational needs. The following State and organization representatives attended the workshop:

- California;
- Kansas;
- Louisiana;
- Missouri;
- Nevada;
- Texas;
- Administration for Children and Families, Region VI;
- Oklahoma State Department of Health;
- Public Strategies, Inc.;
- Oklahoma State Department of Corrections;
- Oklahoma State University Cooperative;
- Oklahoma State University Bureau for Social Research;
- Oklahoma Department of Human Services;
- County Health Department;
- Oklahoma Association of Youth Services; and
- Oklahoma Coalition Against Domestic Violence (DV) and Sexual Assault.

During event planning and coordination, the Welfare Peer TA Network staff asked participants to complete a discussion a guide that was used to gauge current State activity surrounding healthy marriage promotion. In addition, this tool was utilized to determine the informational and resource needs of the participating States. Based on the responses generated, an agenda was developed, which covered a broad range of topics and included speakers from several sectors within Oklahoma, as well as Federal representatives. The following pages of this document capture the information shared and acquired throughout this event.

Workshop Presentations



Welcome

Larry Brendel

TANF Program Manager

Administration for Children and Families

Region VI

Larry Brendel, TANF Program Manager with the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Region VI Office, opened the workshop by welcoming participants on behalf of ACF. For the benefit of children and families, he urged participants to actively listen to the information shared at the event. He further explained the enormous expenditures and impact divorce has on States, families, and children—in terms of direct and indirect cost. The criminal justice system, TANF, food stamps, Medicaid, child support, and juvenile justice were some of the systems highlighted as being directly influenced by divorce and broken families. Finally, he identified two primary goals for TA recipients:

- I. to utilize the time together as an opportunity to learn from one another; and
- II. once participants return home, to begin implementing methods to support couples by helping them develop and sustain healthy marriages.

Overview of Marriage Programs

Mary Myrick

OMI Program Manager

Public Strategies, Inc.

Mary Myrick is Program Manager for the OMI. She is also the President of Public Strategies, Inc., and the public relations firm that has managed the OMI since its inception in 1999. She opened

her presentation with the origination of the OMI, which began when former Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating called for a summit of State leaders. The summit gathered leaders to work with the governor's Health and Human Services Cabinet Secretary to develop an action plan and engage Oklahoma leaders from major sectors (business, religion, government, education, media, legal, service providers, community, and foundations). This multi-sector approach was implemented because the impact of divorce and familial breakdown was identified as a problem impacting every Oklahoma resident and sector. Moreover, ten million of the TANF dollars allocated to Oklahoma were earmarked for the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative. This allocation marks Oklahoma as the first State to finance a program aimed to reduce divorce rates and to improve marriage by utilizing significant amounts of government dollars.

Throughout the 4 years of the OMI, Oklahoma has been involved in a learning process that has benefited future plans and efforts regarding the Initiative. Ms. Myrick believes that Oklahoma's experiences serves as a tool to assist other States in developing a marriage initiative. Below is a presentation of the lessons learned that were identified as a resource for participating States.

**Oklahoma Marriage Initiative
Lessons Learned For Developing A Marriage Initiative**

1. It is important to have clearly defined goals and flexibility.
2. Set measurable goals.
3. Seek out data to inform decisions. In addition, there may be a need to develop a tool to generate independent data.
4. Build capacity – Spend money on building capacity.
5. The marriage initiative should advocate that individuals make good choices and change problematic behavior.
6. A marriage initiative is about marriage, not simply a relationship. Moreover, it isn't about individual marriages, but rather preparing individuals for a major life decision.
7. Good partnerships are necessary. Continue to add to partnerships, for they should continually grow.
8. Remember that all partners possess various missions and mandates.
9. Have specific ideas/reasons/viewpoints for selecting partnership/coalition members.
10. Remember the things to do without cost, such as build capacity and audit the current array of services.
11. Work within the current infrastructure.
12. The most important thing to remember is to do *something*.

Today, the OMI is a broad coalition of groups trying to make positive changes in the lives of Oklahoma's children and families. To support this effort, the OMI facilitates and provides training for stakeholders, social workers, and others. In addition, they have developed intensive interventions and support services, such as the transition to parenthood programs. According to Ms. Myrick, program longevity is largely contributed to the strong relationships across Oklahoma's social systems, such as corrections, youth services, and many others.

Service Delivery System Overview and Implementation

Kendy Cox
Public Strategies

Alesha McGee-Lilly
Oklahoma City County Health Department
OMI PREP Workshop Leader

Ron Grant
Department of Corrections
OMI PREP Workshop Leader

Lisa Hamblin
Extension Educator
Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service

This session involved a panel presentation covering many of Oklahoma's strategies and vehicles for OMI service delivery. The primary component of the OMI is facilitating marriage education services. Such educational services are carried out through Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) workshops throughout Oklahoma. PREP is a research-based approach to help couples prevent divorce and preserve a lasting love. It is a skills and principles-building curriculum designed and based on 20 years of research conducted at the University of Denver. Panel presenters encouraged those participants interested in developing a marriage initiative to identify a marriage educational model that suits their particular program goals. For Oklahoma, the PREP curriculum was primarily selected because it is both empirically informed and tested. In addition, it is the only educational program for couples that has been studied in long-term, controlled follow-ups. There are currently 770 individuals within Oklahoma trained in the PREP curriculum and serving as workshop leaders.

In addition, the Oklahoma City Department of Health (OKCDH) is one of many partners providing marriage education services to Oklahoma residents. As a partner, OKCDH has 2 staff persons trained as PREP workshop facilitators, and a marriage coordinator is also on staff. The marriage coordinator ensures that staff does not make major deviations from the PREP curriculum. Consistency among workshop leaders was identified as a very important factor during this session. Presenters also stated that as partners of the OMI, they have a responsibility to share advocacy efforts and raise OMI awareness. Partners should know their particular community, for it is the community that actually sells the OMI. The OKCDH has made constant efforts to build relationships throughout the community by providing OMI community workshops, which total 21 to-date. Likewise, they actively work to provide the community with the support/incentives that encourage participation throughout Oklahoma. Examples of the support/incentives include childcare and resource books. Incentives are important and help combat recruitment challenges such as childcare and TANF work requirements

Lisa Hamblin, Extension Educator at the Oklahoma State University Cooperative also shared her experiences as a PREP workshop leader. She explained that many of the participants are TANF recipients with additional issues such as domestic violence (DV) and substance abuse. She admits that working with this population raises some challenges when trying to adhere to the PREP curriculum. Furthermore, PREP isn't the appropriate solution to those families facing issues such as substance abuse and violence. In instances such as these, she provides additional referral services. Referred supports are one of the benefits of co-teaching within a community partnership. The referral sources acquired are vast.

As additional OMI activities, PREP workshops are also being conducted in male correctional facilities in Oklahoma. These sessions require the facilitator to customize the workshops to the needs of the male inmates. According to Ron Grant with the Department of Corrections, divorce is 80 percent more likely for those individuals that have been incarcerated a year or more. Likewise, marriage is viewed as a key factor in preventing released prisoners from returning. Therefore, the OMI serves a critical purpose for the correctional system in Oklahoma. While most PREP workshops began with background research, correctional PREP workshops integrate data and statistics later into the session because inmates should be engaged early in the process to secure active participation. Although incarcerated, all participants are expected to complete homework assignments and complete couple exercises during visitation hours. As a participation incentive, training does not count against allowable visitation time. As a result, many of the inmates utilize the lessons learned through PREP training in their relationships with other inmates and correctional staff.

Implementing Marriage Services – A View From Partners

Pam Marr

*Oklahoma State Department of Health Marriage
Coordinator*

Kyle Ridenour

*Oklahoma Association of Youth Services Marriage
Coordinator*

Rachael Neal

*Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension
Service Marriage Coordinator*

Rev. George Young

Holy Temple Baptist Church

As evident throughout all the material presented, Oklahoma has an extensive list of partners. Similar to others, this panel discussion illustrated to participants the key roles and necessity of partners. During the session, the following partners provided participants with an overview of current OMI activities, partnership strategies, and views. which are provided below:

Oklahoma State Health Department

As a partner, the Oklahoma State Health Department (OSHD) works to implement OMI services within alternative schools (i.e., a school serving as an alternative to suspension for youth with behavioral problems), vocational technical centers, and community colleges. In addition, services are provided to high school seniors. OSHD has found that 8-hour workshops are more appropriate for this age group. They also feel that partnering does not distract the agency from its current mission and mandate, but rather assists OSHD in further fulfilling its goals and objectives through innovative approaches (such as a marriage initiative).

Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service

This partner serves as the front door of university research that enhances the quality of life for Oklahoma's residents. Currently, they have 39 PREP educators across the State who possess BA and/or MA's. Partnering with the OMI has resulted in 180 workshops conducted by the University's Extension Services. The high school population is the biggest audience, while TANF recipients remain the second largest group of attendees to participate in offered PREP workshops.

Oklahoma Association of Youth Services

The Oklahoma Association of Youth Services (OAYS) has a contract with the Oklahoma Department of Social Services to provide resources, support and services targeting Oklahoma's youth population. OMI services for this group also falls within the contract's scope of work. By advertising PREP workshops in the newspaper and through public announcements, OMI awareness is spread to many youth and families. Faith and Latino youth activities are stressed, as well as the child welfare system and youth substance abuse treatment facilities. OAYS has found Oklahoma's middle class to have an enormous interest in OMI services, while the lower income group of individuals and families present recruitment challenges.

Holy Temple Baptist Church

The Holy Temple Baptist Church is led by Rev. George Young, who also serves as a PREP workshop leader. As an OMI partner, he provides PREP workshops to low-income individuals and families. Although the middle class is actively seeking out PREP workshops, Rev. Young has seen an impact in the Oklahoma City low-income group. Rev. Young has provided two workshops within a housing project and found that low-income families also appreciate the information provided in the PREP curriculum. His strategy when working with these families is to set the same standards and expectations outlined for middle class participants. His strategy in partnering with the OMI and in providing

services involves the establishment of mutual respect between himself as facilitator and workshop attendees.

The diversity of the information presented during this panel discussion replicated the diversity of Oklahoma residents targeted for OMI services. When developing a marriage initiative, service array and implementation must encompass the varying needs, ages, cultures and economic class of your audience. Therefore, partnerships must be critically examined prior to formation. States should ensure that all partners buy-in, support, and can adapt (through mutual compromise) to the States' overarching objectives for implementing a marriage initiative.

Beyond PREP: Involving and Accessing Additional Couple Supports and Services

Marcia Smith

Oklahoma Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Mary Myrick

Public Strategies, Inc.

Kyle McGraw

*Oklahoma Department of Human Services
Substance Abuse Services
Substance Abuse Services*

OMI staff recognizes that many couples and individuals may possess serious needs that extend beyond the scope of the PREP curriculum. Presenters stressed to participants the importance of informing individuals, couples, and the community of the need to access additional supports. For example, couple workshops are not aimed to minimize many of the serious individual issues, such as substance abuse, that impact a healthy marriage. Kyle McGraw of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Substance Abuse Services Director, expressed similar feelings. He defined the OMI as an additional resource and tool to help treat the substance abuse disease. Substance abuse can potentially destroy the relationships that frame families. Also, strong family ties and healthy relationships are needed to support and maintain the recovery process. Relationships are one of

the many hurdles that substance abusers must work to improve. Therefore, the OMI is viewed as a strong asset to the Oklahoma substance abuse community and partnering is vital to the quality and well-being of Oklahoma children and families. Although the PREP curriculum focuses on marriage, Mr. McGraw feels the PREP curriculum provides many family and relationship benefits for clients.

As an additional partner in the OMI, Marcia Smith, a representative for the Oklahoma DV community, honestly shared her initial concerns with the OMI. However, after ongoing communication with OMI project staff, she now views the OMI as a vehicle for DV advocacy and an opportunity to educate individuals on the warning signals and risks for potential abuse within a relationship. As an OMI partner, she works to ensure that PREP workshop leaders understand the severity of DV and are able to properly provide couples/individuals with appropriate DV supports and emergency resources, if needed. The role of the DV community in the OMI is to ensure the OMI has a strong safety provision in place. Although the PREP curriculum doesn't have a DV component, she works to ensure that PREP workshop leaders can properly address possible DV issues, and make appropriate referrals.

In Oklahoma, over 800 individuals have had some exposure to DV training through PREP training. Oklahoma is not going to stop providing OMI services, but will critically develop methods to further promote safety. For Ms. Smith, PREP is more than marital training, but rather the provision of additional resources and supports, such as DV. The DV community identifies PREP workshops as a tool providing needed safety prevention and intervention within families. Rather than not doing anything and possibly ignoring safety concerns, partnering with the OMI is regarded as more beneficial to Oklahoma families.

This session ended with a discussion regarding OMI services that target couples transitioning to parenthood. Since parenting can potentially add to the stressors many couples face, Oklahoma believes that the OMI should offer new parents transitional resources. Strategies are currently being examined to work with health maintenance organizations, who will provide accessible services that prepare new parents. New fathers are specifically targeted under this effort. It is imperative that fathers feel that they have a significant role in the parenting experience from the beginning, which contributes to family well-being.

PREP Workshop

Rev. George Young
Holy Temple Baptist Church

To assist participants in further understanding PREP workshops and the information covered, a brief lecture from the PREP curriculum was facilitated by Rev. Young, PREP workshop leader. He actively engaged participants and led them through a series of communicating/listening techniques designed for couples. As mock workshop attendees, participants also experienced discussions on the various issues that impact effective communication within relationships. Participants observed as Rev. Young demonstrated strategies for properly handling the sensitive issues that may arise during a workshop and require outside resources.

Faith-Based Collaborations and Family Strengthening Efforts

Rev. George Young
Holy Trinity Baptist Church

Rev. Young opened this session with his initial reactions to the OMI. He informed participants that he originally possessed some apprehension to the government decision to instruct others on marriage satisfaction and stability. As a pastor, he felt the government had no authority to inform and educate the faith community on marriage, for marriage is an institution that God governs.

Having assessed his initial feelings and concerns, he later realized that the clergy was part of the problem that caused the high divorce rate plaguing Oklahoma. The faith community was actively performing marriages, but failed to provide ongoing support and follow up to married couples. He believes that couples in Oklahoma no longer viewed the “the church” as a resource. As a result, he became a supporter and active stakeholder in the OMI.

As an OMI partner, the Oklahoma faith community is not contracted with the Oklahoma Department of Social Services to provide OMI services. This partnership is built on a mutual belief that better marriages help yield better children, families, and communities. PREP workshops are delivered by the Oklahoma faith sector free of charge in most instances. In addition, clergy have the option of utilizing the standard PREP curriculum or the specialized Christian PREP curriculum. Regardless of the curriculum selected, participants are informed during enrollment if their workshop is being facilitated by a member of the faith community. It is important couples make informed decisions when registering for PREP workshops.

Rev. Young urged participants to involve the faith community in their efforts to develop a marriage initiative. He also outlined the following guiding principles for States:

Developing a Marriage Initiative Principles for Partnering with the Faith Community	
I.	Include the faith community early in efforts to develop a healthy marriage. By doing so, the faith community becomes stakeholders.
II.	Remind your faith community that you are here to help them.
III.	The faith community is an essential entity to have. By including them, they can become a resource and a service provider.
IV.	Help the faith community to understand the benefits of partnering. Show that a marriage initiative is simply what the faith community should already be doing—stewardship of the marriage entity.
V.	Select churches/organizations that are already doing work that focuses on healthy marriages. They are more likely to help you or integrate their current services with your initiative.

Marriage and Family Strategies – The Human Services Perspective

Mary Stalaker

*Oklahoma Department of Human Services Family
Support Division*

Shirley Lodes

Oklahoma Department of Human Services

Mary Jo. Kinzie

Oklahoma Department of Human Services

This session was a panel presentation of Oklahoma's State perspective of the OMI. Presenters began by attributing much of the OMI's success to the commitment of Secretary Howard Hendrick. The commitment and support of the Oklahoma's governor was also noted as extremely beneficial. With this legislative support in place, Oklahoma decided to commit 10 million of their TANF revenue to develop the OMI. Rather than house the OMI in a State agency, Oklahoma decided to hire a private firm (Public Strategies, Inc.) to manage their project. The benefits of this decision were identified as: (1) It helped to remove the stigma of government involvement in marriage; and (2) Public Strategies Inc., has a public relations, media, and communication background that has proven to be very useful in marketing OMI.

Once the decision was made to develop a marriage initiative and the funding source was determined, the State began to educate staff on the benefits of a marriage initiative. However, moving forward presented obstacles for the State to overcome. For example, many of the State's human services staff possessed impeding issues and experiences regarding marriage within their own families. Therefore, it was difficult to encourage staff to educate their clients on the benefits of marriage education. The State also faced various opponents. Oklahoma diligently worked to inform the public that Oklahoma was not forcing people to stay in unhealthy marriages. Likewise, many criticized Oklahoma for utilizing their TANF dollars for such a project. As a result, the State worked to inform critics that the marriage initiative was not pulling resources and services intended for TANF families.

While admitting the criticism and skepticism encountered, panel presenters shared the State's ongoing commitment to the provision and promotion of its marriage initiative. New strategies and opportunities for progress are examined daily. To-date, OMI services not only center on married couples, but youth and teens as well. The Oklahoma Department of Human Services (DHS) has partnered with the Oklahoma school system to provide OMI services within the school setting. Through this partnership, the school system pays a portion of the OMI services provided by a school based social worker. The social worker serves as a liaison between his/her school and DHS. The majority of the social worker's time is devoted to school; therefore, PREP workshops and other OMI services are primarily offered after school or during school breaks. Oklahoma felt that PREP training within schools was needed to make OMI services available to school families; thus, making OMI services more broad based.

Program Ideas

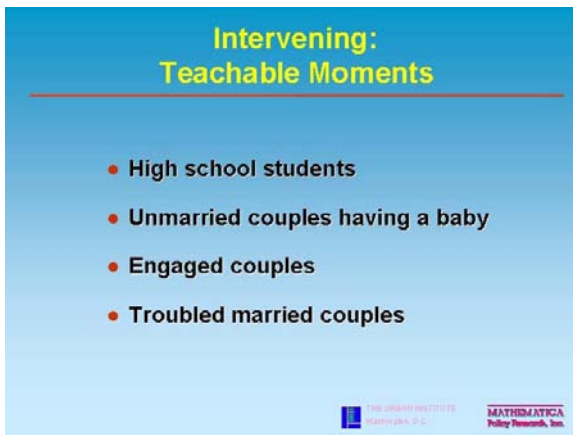
Matthew Stagner
Unwed Parents Programs
Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Kendy Cox
Community Coalitions
Public Strategies, Inc.

Mathew Stagner, Ph.D., began this session with a slide presentation on the Building Strong Families (BSF) project led by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Mathematica is currently in the beginning stages of this large-scale 6-site demonstration and longitudinal evaluation of programs for unwed parents at the time of the child's birth. The BSF project focuses on learning whether well-designed interventions can help couples fulfill their aspirations for a healthy marriage and a strong family. The project will test program interventions with low-income, unwed couples—beginning at the time of the child's birth. The programs will be designed to help such couples strengthen their relationship, achieve a healthy marriage, if that is the path they choose, and thus enhance child and family well-being. Programs will be designed around two primary components. First, the programs will provide instruction and support to improve marriage and relationship skills

and enhance couples' understanding of marriage. In addition, the programs designed will provide a variety of services that may assist low-income couples sustain a healthy relationship.

Mr. Stagner also highlighted research findings generated from other Mathematica studies. His slide presentation to participants is provided below:



**Intervening:
Teachable Moments**

- High school students
- Unmarried couples having a baby
- Engaged couples
- Troubled married couples

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1



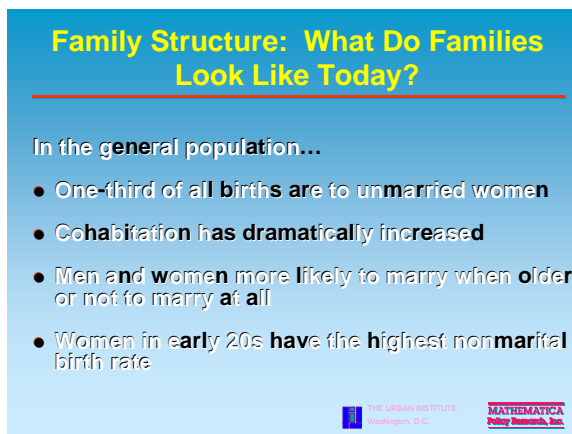
Consequences for Children

- Serious consequences for children, parents, their communities, and society as a whole
- On average, children growing up without their own married parents more likely to:
 - Grow up in poverty
 - Develop a host of poor outcomes
 - drop out of school, become teen parents, juvenile delinquency, drug/alcohol abuse

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2



Family Structure: What Do Families Look Like Today?

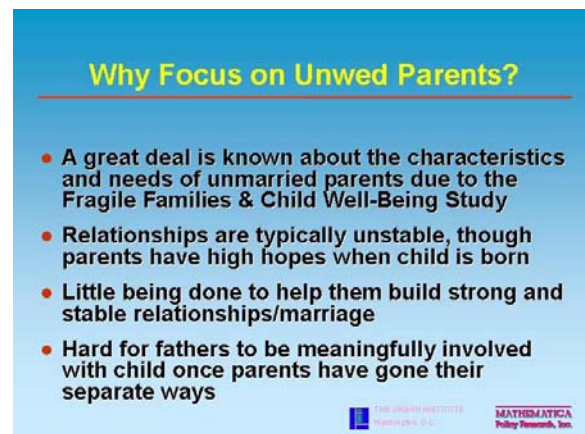
In the general population...

- One-third of all births are to unmarried women
- Cohabitation has dramatically increased
- Men and women more likely to marry when older or not to marry at all
- Women in early 20s have the highest nonmarital birth rate

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3



Why Focus on Unwed Parents?

- A great deal is known about the characteristics and needs of unmarried parents due to the Fragile Families & Child Well-Being Study
- Relationships are typically unstable, though parents have high hopes when child is born
- Little being done to help them build strong and stable relationships/marriage
- Hard for fathers to be meaningfully involved with child once parents have gone their separate ways

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4

Unmarried Parents and the “Magic Moment”

- High hopes for their future relationship as a family at time of child’s birth
 - 82% are romantically involved; many hope to marry
 - Nearly half are cohabiting
 - Fathers are supportive, affectionate
 - Both parents tend to agree marriage is better for children

5

Challenges Facing Unmarried Parents

- Barriers to carrying out their plans
 - Lower education, employment
 - Complex family relationships
 - Distrust of opposite sex in some groups
 - May have personal challenges that affect relationships

6

Knowledge on How Marriage/ Relationships Can Be Strengthened

- Interpersonal behaviors that predict relationship/marital failure or success
- Evidence that skills-based instruction can help build stronger relationships and marriage and reduce instability
- Most research done with married or engaged white middle-class couples
 - Need to adapt and build programs for unmarried parents (low-income)
 - Need to test and refine programs

7

Research to Learn What Works for Unwed Parents

- Developed a research-based conceptual framework for interventions
- Studying emerging programs for unwed parents
- A demonstration and rigorous program evaluation -- *Building Strong Families*

8

Developing a Conceptual Framework for Intervention

- What are the broad factors to consider in program design, implementation, and evaluation
- What are the:
 - circumstances associated with nonmarital births
 - services that could strengthen relationships
 - desired short-term intervention outcomes
 - long-term outcomes for families

9

Methods for Developing the CF

- Literature review on unmarried parents, relationships, and marriage
- Direct observation of marriage education classes and programs that serve low-income parents
- Consultations with expert practitioners, policymakers, and researchers from diverse backgrounds

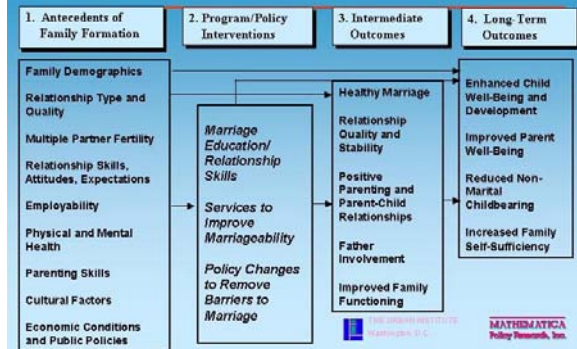
10

Intervention with New Unwed Parents Interested in Marriage

- Relationship and marital skills education, information, and support
- Services to improve “marriageability”
 - Employment, assessment and treatment for physical and mental health issues
- Public policy changes
 - Reduce disincentives to marriage by adjusting eligibility/benefits levels for government assistance, child support policies

11

A Conceptual Framework



12

Programs for New Unwed Parents Are Emerging

- A handful of organizations and agencies are implementing programs to strengthen relationships among new unwed parents
- Several others currently planning or designing programs for unwed parents
- Considerable interest in developing programs contingent upon the availability of resources and technical assistance

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Providing TA to Emerging Programs and Documenting Lessons Learned

- Now available to states/local agencies and CBOs interested in targeted program approach
- Types of assistance:
 - Facilitating strategy and design meetings
 - Assistance in building support for a program
 - Planning how to recruit potential participants
 - Help assessing service needs and gaps
 - Focus groups to understand population needs
 - Help selecting/adapting curriculum
 - Guidance in setting up systems for monitoring progress

14

Key Implementation Issues

- Attracting couples to the program -- not just mothers or fathers
- Identifying vehicle through which to recruit or deliver services
- Choosing a curriculum for marriage/relationship education; identifying the need for other services
- Setting up system to monitor recruitment and service delivery progress
- Determining duration, intensity of intervention
- Staff background, training needs

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Building Strong Families Evaluation Plan

- Define a program model based on CF and ongoing consultations
- Work with multiple sites to provide TA and facilitate a pilot test
- Select six well-conceived programs and study their implementation
- Test program impacts in the six sites

16

Critical BSF Program Features


- **Comprehensive and intensive intervention**
- **Focus on couples, not just mothers or fathers**
- **Ultimate aim is improving child well-being**
- **Serving broadly defined unwed parent population (not exclusively TANF recipients)**



17

Principles Guiding BSF Program Model


- **Voluntary participation – choice is key**
- **Marriage not the ideal; but healthy marriage**
- **Systematic and ongoing assessment for signs of domestic abuse/violence**
- **Program content will be informed by the best available research and program experience**



18

BSF Project Schedule

	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11
Support Program Development	*****									
Mentor pilot	*****									
Enroll sample	*****									
Document services	*****									
Follow-up surveys	*****									
Analyze/report impacts	*****									



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For More Information

- **BSF documents available for distribution through www.buildingstrongfamilies.info**
- **Referrals welcome concerning technical assistance: Contact Robin Dion**

♦ (202)-464-5262
 ♦ rdion@mathematica-mpr.com



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Mr. Stagner reminded participants that Mathematica serves as a resource to support potential program sponsors who need additional information on the healthy marriage approach to services, particularly the BSF project, and how to develop a BSF program. He also shared the Web site developed for the BSF project (www.buildingstrongfamilies.info). Here, reviewers will find general information about the project, the full conceptual framework report, and a first brief paper summarizing the main points of the conceptual framework. In the future, briefs regarding design issues, profiles of available curricula, curriculum recommendations, and other useful information will be added to the site.

To close this session, Public Strategies, Inc., provided a presentation sharing their recommendations for building community coalitions that support a marriage initiative. The discussion points from this slide presentation are provided below:

I.	<p>Value of Coalitions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capacity to reach at risk populations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each organization brings new and different ideas to the table re: target groups 2. Shared resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial • Experience 3. Greater potential for stability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial • Political 4. Credibility
II.	<p>Coalition Building is Demanding!</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Time and energy to build and nurture relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitivity to cautions and concerns is imperative 2. Leadership and consensus building are essential skills 3. Eventually staff will be needed to support the process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regardless of the scope of the project, it is naïve to think that it can be supported by one person dedicating 15-20 hours per week.
III.	<p>Getting Started</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Start with a small group of “natural” allies 2. Gather data about the status of marriage, divorce and marriage-related services in the community/State <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit current services • Internet searches 3. Have a clear vision of what you want to accomplish UP FRONT, then be flexible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You will not be credible without this 4. Develop a beginning framework for the scope of your proposed program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can not do everything – a narrow focus is good. 5. Make one-on-one personal contacts with key stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch-all meetings with multiple groups/individuals will not accomplish a great deal • This strategy gives you the opportunity to deal with individual issues or concerns privately • Approach like you would approach a job interview (e.g. research, preparation, and etc.) 6. Form a steering committee or other small planning group 7. Try to engage multiple sectors. Don’t just focus on one group
IV.	<p>Potential Partners</p>

	<p>1. Government/Agency members may be able to provide access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funds and in-kind resources • Access to target populations • Existing infrastructure • Political support <p>2. Community-base Groups/Agencies may be able to provide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the community landscape • Access to local services • Business and corporate support <p>3. There are benefits/struggles with both groups – A healthy balance of coalition members is good</p>
V.	<p>Examples of Potential Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universities • Local Government • WIC • TANF • Domestic Violence Programs • Child Support • Community Action Agencies • Child Welfare • Head Start/Schools

Research and Program Evaluation

Dr. Christine Johnson

Oklahoma State University Bureau of Social Research

Dr. Christine Johnson, Director of the Bureau of Social Research at the Oklahoma State University, facilitated an informal discussion with TA participants on the topic of OMI research activities. To ensure OMI services and activities meet the needs facing Oklahoma couples, Dr. Johnson and others gathered data through designed needs assessments. The information acquired is used to further evolve the OMI while addressing the vast needs of families. The current OMI research focus is on process evaluation. Oklahoma is interested in determining the quality of their OMI services. By conducting a process evaluation, the State aims to understand whether or not the OMI is achieving its intended goals. According to Dr. Johnson, Oklahoma has a long-term commitment to evaluating the OMI. Oklahoma welcomes the evaluation process as an opportunity to discover and implement needed changes. She further urged participants to set realistic measurable goals for their marriage initiative. Goals should be defined in a manner so they

can be properly evaluated and assessed. Likewise, participants were told their OMI mission, who they are as an organization/agency, and the intended service population are all pertinent information to be considered when developing and evaluating goals.

Closing Remarks

In closing, Oklahoma was applauded for their hospitality as State host for this event. The candor and willingness to share the OMI experiences was referred to as a valuable resource for participating States. Participants were instructed to use the information acquired to better educate their organizations, programs, and State on the benefits of developing a healthy marriage initiative. Many participants expressed an enhanced understanding of what a healthy marriage initiative involves, and its intended aims. For several participants, this clarity will assist them in discussing possible State options in developing similar efforts. Through this event, Oklahoma illustrated the varying service opportunities possible with an OMI.

A

Participant Evaluations

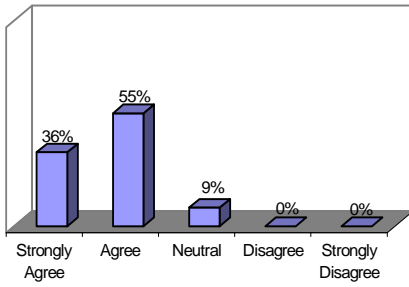
Oklahoma Marriage Initiative Workshop Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

July 15-16, 2003

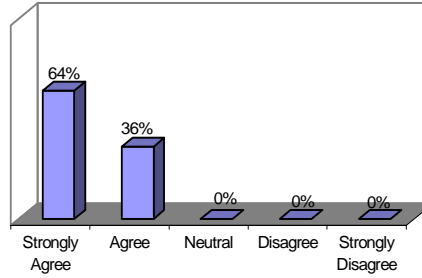
Workshop Coordinators....

N=11

Adequately prepared you for meeting

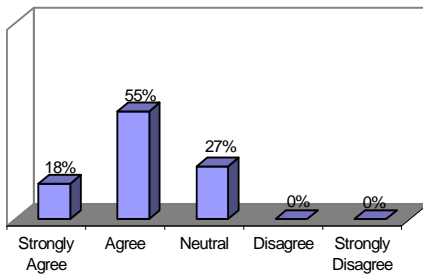


Handled the preparation, arrangements and scheduling in a timely, courteous, and competent manner

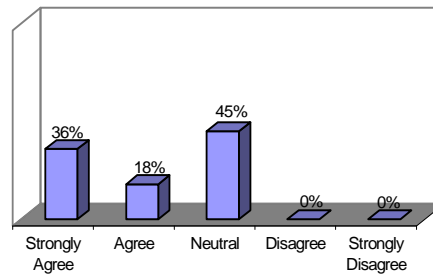


Speakers...

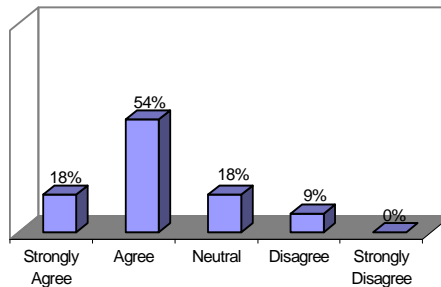
Were thorough in the subject areas presented



Engaged the audience and facilitated discussions



The information presented will be useful in developing new practices and/or policies within my organization



Written Comments

What did you find most useful about attending this workshop?

- “Sound practical concept that would lead to better outcomes for people in their relationships”
- “Better understanding of Marriage Initiative – Obtained detailed information concerning States’ challenges/programs/approach”
- “The discussion on the PREP program and how it was designed”
- “This provided a quick immersion with this initiative. I have gained a valuable network for future communication and implementation of program.”
- “Evaluation component overview by partners – I needed to hear the “whole package of info.”
- “Pastor Young’s comments on engaging faith community and being able to talk directly with Oklahoma staff”
- “Handouts, good information, discussion, question and answer”
- “The general information about the initiative was informative.”

What issues would you like to have had more discussion about during the workshop?

- “PREP relationship processes”
- “How this worked operationally in the agency – Who do they have contracts with? How were they designed?”
- “Funding (foundations)”
- “More detailed information regarding the evaluation process”
- “Very thorough, comprehensive presentation that allowed for questions and answers”
- “An organization chart”

Is there anything you can think of that would have made this workshop more valuable to you?

- “No, well thought out and well planned workshop – Grateful for the opportunity to attend”
- “Funding strategies – How to connect this with other initiatives?”
- “This was an excellent workshop. I cannot think of anything else you could have addressed! Thanks!”

- “Less talk about PREP”
- “No – Excellent context setting, access to additional resources, involvement of all critical partners and participation opportunities”
- “Excellent meeting overall – Thank you!”
- “More discussion about funding – Who has the contracts? How are they implemented?”

Agenda



OKLAHOMA Marriage Initiative Workshop

AGENDA

TUESDAY, JULY 15

- 7:30 a.m. **Continental Breakfast**
- 8:30 a.m. **Welcome**
Larry Brendel
Administration for Children and Families
Region VI
- Participants Reconfirm Goals for Meeting**
Mary Myrick
Public Strategies
- Larry Brendel*
Administration for Children and Families
Region VI
- 9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. **Overview of Marriage Programs**
Mary Myrick
Public Strategies
- 10:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. **Break**
- 10:15 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. **Service Delivery System Overview and Implementation**
Kendy Cox
Public Strategies
Marriage Education Services & Youth Education Services
- Ron Grant*
Department of Corrections
Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI) PREP Workshop Leader
- Theresa Baird, Lois Pokorny, Alesha McGee-Lilly*
Oklahoma City-County Health Department/Oklahoma Marriage Initiative
PREP Workshop Leader
- 12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. **Lunch and Discussion**
During this session each state will provide a brief overview of their state efforts, policies, practices and challenges in implementing a healthy marriage initiative within their state.

1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Implementing Marriage Services—A View From Partners

Pam Marr

Oklahoma State Department of Health Marriage Coordinator

Rachel Neal

Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service Marriage Coordinator

Kyle Ridenour

Oklahoma Association of Youth Services Marriage Coordinator

Vicki Reynolds

Redbud Family Counseling Center
OMI PREP Workshop Leader

Nicole Holman-Alexander

Tulsa Community Action Agency
OMI PREP Workshop Leader

Dan Ervin, Tinker Air Force Base

OMI PREP Workshop Leader

Moderator: *Kelly Roberts*, Public Strategies

3:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

Break

3:15 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.

Beyond PREP: Involving and Accessing Additional Couple Supports and Services

Marcia Smith

Oklahoma Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Kyle McGraw

Substance Abuse Services

Debbie Anderson

Marriage Education & Transition to Parenthood

4:45 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.

Discussion/Application

Mary Myrick

Public Strategies

6:30 p.m.

PREP Workshop/Dinner

This session is designed to provide participants with working knowledge of a marriage education workshop experience. Over dinner, a seasoned Oklahoma Marriage Initiative workshop leader will present a lecture from the PREP curriculum.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 16

- 8:00 a.m. **Continental Breakfast**
- 9:00 a.m. – 9:45 a.m. **Faith Based Collaborations and Family Strengthening Efforts**
George Young
Holy Temple Baptist Church
Oklahoma Marriage Initiative
- Adrian Jordan*
Oklahoma Marriage Initiative Faith Sector Liaison
- 9:45 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. **Break**
- 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. **Marriage and Family Strategies – The Human Services Perspective**
Mary Stalnaker
Oklahoma Department of Human Services Family Support Division
- Mary Jo Kinzie*
Oklahoma Department of Human Services
- Shirley Lodes*
Oklahoma Department of Human Services
- 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. **Program Ideas**
Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. – Unwed Parents Programs
Kendy Cox, Public Strategies, Inc. – Community Coalitions
- 12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. **Lunch/State Perspectives Discussion**
Group Facilitators:
Mary Myrick, Public Strategies
Kendy Cox, Public Strategies
Kelly Roberts, Public Strategies
- During this small group activity, facilitators will work with each state and identify challenges, ideas and strategies to developing a healthy marriage initiative within their state.
- 2:00 p.m. – 2:15 p.m. **Break**
- 2:15 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. **Research and Program Evaluation**
Dr. Christine Johnson
Oklahoma State University Bureau for Social Research
- 3:15 p.m. – 3:45 p.m. **Closing Remarks**
Larry Brendel
Administration for Children and Families
Region VI
- Chandra Robinson*
AFYA, Inc.

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OKLAHOMA CITY, OK
JULY 15 - 16, 2003

OKLAHOMA Marriage Initiative Workshop

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