

Head Start Healthy Marriage Newsletter

January 2010

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Healthy Marriage Program Reports Success

Congratulations to all 24
Head Start Healthy Marriage
grantees for a successful two
years of providing marriage
education and family
strengthening services to
couples and individuals.

By the end of year two,
grantees achieved over
120% percent of their units-
per-year goals. In their first
two years, grantees provided
more than 13,000 individuals
a minimum of eight hours of
healthy marriage education.

More than 90 percent of
those who participated said
they were satisfied with the
program, and more than 70
percent reported improved
marital satisfaction.

Organization Highlight: Municipalidad de Mayaguez

The Municipality of Mayaguez Head Start is the grantee for the Puerto Rico Head Start Healthy Marriage Initiative, working in a unique collaboration with five other Head Start agencies throughout the island of Puerto Rico.



The mission of the agency's Healthy Marriage program is to help couples improve their relationship with each other and with their children, which then has a positive impact on society. "If you have strong roots, then the fruits from your tree will be strong and you will then have a healthier, stronger society," said Elba Falto, Director of the Healthy Marriage Initiative for Municipalidad de Mayaguez.

Those served by the Healthy Marriage program in Puerto Rico have very low levels of education, as well as health and nutrition problems associated with their low-income status. Alcoholism, sexual abuse, and domestic violence are problems plaguing Puerto Rican society, and Falto's aim is for the Healthy Marriage Program to influence all of these issues through the values it shares with the communities.

The Puerto Rican program offers classes in family wellness tailored to address Latino issues such as machismo. "The thought behind machismo is that whatever the father says goes, and that the woman is just there to make the man happy," Falto explained. "With this program, we want children to see good communication between the mother and father, and see shared decision making. If they have a problem, they need to figure it out together."

Falto said many female participants once felt afraid to talk to their husbands. After the classes, however, they were no longer intimidated. "Because of this class, the couple can decide together what is best for both of them and as a family." Falto told a story of a couple who had lived together for 17 years and refused to marry. After completing the healthy marriage classes, they decided to get married and become mentors for other couples.

The Healthy Marriage staff is dedicated to long-term commitment to every participant, Falto said. "We are always involved in the community so families never feel they are alone and without support."

Congratulations on a job well done!

If a family has a problem, we go to help them and give them the tools they need to solve it.

Parent Panel Addresses Head Start Healthy Marriage Conference



In November, 2009, three couples were chosen to speak at the National Head Start Healthy Marriage Conference in Washington, DC on the changes that have occurred in their families due to the organization's marriage and family programs.

As part of a parent panel, the three couples helped grantees gain insight into their own programs from a participant perspective. Lori Chaves, Director of the Holyoke Chicopee Head Start Healthy Marriage program, said the experience helped her team decide to pursue further research on how home environment and parent-child interactions impact a child's behavior.

The event was not only beneficial for leaders from grantee organizations. It also helped the couples who were involved. "There were a lot of firsts for these parents -- for mom and dad to be alone together without the children, to fly in an airplane, and to share what they learned in front of a large group," Chaves explained.

"Even though we had taken the classes, we were still learning about ourselves and each other in DC," said Pasia Sloan of Milwaukee. "Just being in a different atmosphere to get in touch with one another by ourselves was important for us," Jamar Sloan added, describing the impact of the week.

The couple said they felt the support of every participant at the conference, and noted that some in the audience were crying when they spoke. "Really seeing people willing to take chances and giving people a shot at improving their relationships was very impactful," Mr. Sloan said.

The Sloans told attendees the marriage classes offered by Milwaukee's Social Development Commission Head Start Program enriched the relationships within their family. "These classes helped us understand what it was that we were reaching for for so long. Now we know what those things are and how to utilize the tools we were given." Mr. Sloan said. "I'd like to say to all families struggling that they should definitely give these courses a try. They have empowered me to be a better father, man, and husband. It's worth it."

Family Enrichment Network Receives Governor's Nomination

The Head Start program of Family Enrichment Network (FEN) recently received a nomination from the Governor of New York declaring the agency has the state's approval to apply for a Center of Excellence award.



The nomination process is highly competitive, and the Governor's nomination is the required first step to becoming a Center of Excellence as stated in the Head Start Act. FEN received the nomination because of its high-quality program delivery, and its ability to serve as a "model by implementing comprehensive, innovative and targeted approaches to enhance program services." The Healthy Marriage Program implemented by the FEN Head Start staff is just one of the many exemplary services provided by the agency. FEN will begin the full application process in January, 2010.

Only 10 Head Start centers across the United States will receive a Center of Excellence award along with \$200,000 dollars to expand and support their Head Start program. Centers of Excellence leaders will have the opportunity to use the award to increase the number of participants, provide further training to staff, and augment best practice services to enhance the overall program.

Kate Grippen, Head Start Director for Family Enrichment Network, explained that even though the nomination was not the "end of the story," it held significance for those who work to make Family Enrichment Network's Head Start program a successful model for early childhood education. "Even though it's just the first step in becoming a Center of Excellence, for our agency, it's a big deal."