

# Head Start Healthy Marriage Newsletter

April 2010

## Table of Contents

Partner Highlight: Wayne County Head Start Pathstone in Partnership Healthy Marriage in the News

## Announcement

The Head Start Healthy Marriage Initiative Brochure is forthcoming and is in its final stages of publication. Thank you to all the grantees who participated in the creation of the brochure, and for continuing in the important work you do for families every day.

## Healthy Marriage in the News



KSL-5 News of Salt Lake City, Utah recently highlighted the Step Family Education program offered by Utah State University, a program funded by the Office of Family Assistance Healthy Marriage Initiative.

The news story commended the program for equipping step families with the resources necessary to help families adjust to

## Partner Highlight: Wayne County Head Start

The Wayne County Head Start Healthy Marriage Program is challenged to meet the needs of fifteen distinct cultures in its Head Start program, each with a unique perspective on marriage and family.

The Dearborn neighborhood, for example, has the largest number of Arab American families in the nation. In this community, most marriages are arranged and the notion of "falling in love" does not exist. This cultural distinction is just one of the many challenges Wayne County faces in providing effective Healthy Marriage services to its diverse audience.

In addition to diversity, Wayne County citizens also undergo the consequence of having the highest unemployment rate in the nation. Former employees that once worked for a booming auto industry are now Head Start eligible, and live under the immense financial and familial stress that often follows long-term unemployment.

Carolyn Gray, Executive Director of Health and Family Services of Wayne County, explained that in order to meet the needs of this diverse community, the program implements six curricula, each serving a different target population.

"Caring for My Family" focuses on individuals and couples with children, teaching skills to make healthy choices in parenting and relationships.

"The Family Wellness: Survival Skills" curriculum helps families appreciate their role in working as a team to solve problems and discuss difficult or uncomfortable topics.

"P.I.C.K.-A-Partner" addresses healthy dating, and helps



A facilitator conducts one of the many workshops offered at Wayne County

their new dynamic.

Abril Bell, Project Manager for the Head Start Healthy Marriage Grant at Utah State University, said within 24 hours of the story's broadcast, about 20 people called or emailed the University to enroll in the Step Family Education program.

Bell explained that even though the story covered services funded by the Office of Family Assistance, it has proven a great benefit to the Head Start Healthy Marriage program.

"Because of the story, we have been able to channel many of the callers who are Head Start eligible into our (Head Start Healthy Marriage) Program."

Bell said the story focused on the increasing number of stepfamilies in Salt Lake City, and their need for resources to help them better cope with their extended families.

Bell explained that resources for stepfamilies are often difficult to find, and many families are not prepared for the changing environment.

"The story emphasized the unique dynamics of stepfamilies and why these classes have helped them to adjust to the new living environment,"

To view the full news story, [click here](#).

participants recognize the qualities of a potential mate. The "Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program" is for individuals and couples on the marriage track, and focuses on building healthy expectations, commitment, and communication skills.

"Smart Steps for Stepfamilies" targets remarried or partnering couples and their children. This unique course helps couples learn their roles as stepparents in understanding the legal and financial issues of stepfamilies, and teaches methods for coping with children and adolescent behavior.

Nearly all participants rate the classes as "very good" or "excellent," and report the curriculum helps them learn how to communicate and resolve conflicts. In addition, 10 percent of those who completed a follow-up survey report greater commitments toward marriage by becoming married or engaged.

Reflecting on her experience in the program, one participant said: *"I've improved (my) anger issues by better understanding where my anger was coming from. Now, I can better myself so I can be fit for the sort of man I'm looking for. I let go of a destructive relationship because I realized I was having old issues that had nothing to do with the man."*

For year three, staff of the Wayne County Healthy Marriage program decided to significantly change its outreach strategies by hiring five former Head Start Healthy Marriage parents as project recruiters. Each recruiter is assigned to a different delegate agency to bring Head Start parents into the Healthy Marriage program. "Because of this one-to-one contact, parents are more apt to respond to the recruiters," said Maria Cross, Project Director of Healthy Marriage Healthy Relationship Initiative. "They are out there from the moment a child is dropped off to when they are picked up, and form relationships with the parents."

## Pathstone in Partnership

The Pathstone Carbon County Head Start Healthy Marriage Program formed a partnership with Employment And Retention Advancement Network (E.A.R.N.) in October 2009 to provide healthy marriage workshops to participants in the workforce program.

Daisy Valdez, Program Coordinator for E.A.R.N.,

helps prepare individuals to enter or re-enter the workforce after a long time living on welfare. Valdez said as she searched for the deeper issues related to unemployment and prolonged welfare among her participants, she found most of the issues stemmed from problems at home.

"Many are not motivated to find work because of conflicts with their spouses or partners, as well as self esteem issues," Valdez said. "When I heard about the Head Start Healthy Marriage Program and how it helps families, we decided to partner."

Since the inception of the partnership, the benefits of healthy marriage courses for Head Start eligible E.A.R.N. participants have been obvious. Valdez said that some participants have become "a whole different person" as a result of the courses.



Participants from Pathstone at the 2009  
Healthy Marriage Retreat