



St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition

Evaluation Report

October 2006



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***St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition
Year One Evaluation Report
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St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition Year One Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

In 2005, the St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition received funding from the Office of Child Support Enforcement to implement the **Healthy Relationship Skills for Fragile Families** teaching demonstration project, a three-year grant initiative. The program's purpose is to teach responsible parenting and healthy marriage skills to fragile families. Through participating in educational classes within a safe environment, a key program goal is to increase child support assistance for the custodial parent.

The Family Wellness curriculum, which serves as the foundation for service delivery, is a research-based, culturally competent program used throughout the United States to address essential parenting skills, personal responsibility skills, and basic relationship skills. The target audience is at-risk urban African American, Bosnian and Hispanic mothers and fathers. The project is a collaborative effort on the part of the St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition, Fathers' Support Center, Our Lady's Inn, and Family Support Council, with assistance from the Family Support Division (FSD), the Missouri child support enforcement agency, and local St. Louis FSD offices.

Program objectives include the following:

- Improved relationships between parents and their children;
- Increased parental involvement with their children;
- Increased financial payments from non-custodial parents for their children;
- Decreased number of adversarial relationships between parent partners; and
- Increased progress toward family formation among parent partners.

The St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition contracted with Philliber Research Associates to create, collect, and analyze pre- and post-surveys that measure progress toward program objectives. The following report summarizes data collected since the onset of service delivery in March 2006.

To date, 234 participants have completed both pre- and post-surveys (a response rate of 81%) which measured changes in comfort levels related to parenting and relationships. In addition, surveys assessed participant satisfaction with program services. Data gathered from participants at the time of the pre- and post-surveys support the following positive outcomes:

- An increase in participants' comfort levels engaging in the following behaviors:
 - Caring for their children;
 - Spending time with their children;
 - Communicating with their children;
 - Making decisions regarding their children; and
 - Positively disciplining their children.

- **The majority (64%) of participants reported that they believed their participation in the Family Wellness program would improve their abilities to work with their children's other parent for financial support "some" or "a lot."**
- **Most (84%) participants reported that they believed their relationships with others would improve "some" or "a lot" as a result of program participation.**

In addition, participants were asked to indicate skills that they had learned as a result of program participation. Responses varied from interpersonal skills to parenting skills and include the following:

- **Adult relationship skills;**
- **Communication skills;**
- **Listening skills;**
- **Cooperation;**
- **Disciplining in a positive way, including alternatives to physical discipline;**
- **Speaking up for themselves and staying in charge of situations; and**
- **Consistent rule setting.**

Data suggest that the Family Wellness program is making progress toward the program objectives of improved relationships between parents and their children, increased parental involvement with their children, and decreased number of adversarial relationships between parent partners.

St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition Part I: Baseline Results

Participant Characteristics

Since the onset of service delivery in March 2006, 331 participants have completed pre-surveys and received services through the Family Wellness program. As shown in the table to the right, participant characteristics include the following:

- Seventy percent of participants were female;
- The majority (70%) were African American, followed by 18% who were Hispanic;
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of participants were between the ages of 20 and 39 years, for an average age of 32 years;
- The number of children reported by participants ranged from none to nine, for an average of two children per participant;
- The majority (71%) were either single or married;
- More than half (57%) were employed either on a full-time or part-time basis, while 43% were unemployed; and
- Services were provided at fourteen sites, with more than half (53%) of all participants receiving program services through Accion Social Comunitaria, Hilltop Daycare Center, Fathers' Support Center, and Monument of Faith.

Participant Characteristics

	Percent
Gender:	
Female	70%
Male	30%
Race/ethnicity:	
African American	70%
Hispanic/Latino(a)	18%
Caucasian	11%
Bi-racial	2%
Age:	(n=257)
19 or younger	8%
20-29 years	39%
30-39 years	34%
40-49 years	13%
50-59 years	5%
60-69 years	1%
70-79 years	1%
Number of children:	
None	6%
One	31%
Two	24%
Three	18%
Four	9%
Five or more	12%
Marital status:	
Single	47%
Married	24%
Separated	9%
Divorced	7%
Living with partner	7%
Engaged	5%
Widowed	2%
Employment status:	
Employed full-time	38%
Employed part-time	18%
Unemployed	43%
Retired	1%
Site:	
Accion Social Comunitaria	17%
Hilltop Daycare Center	14%
Fathers' Support Center	13%
Monument of Faith	9%
Salvation Army	8%
Women's Safe House	7%
YWCA Head Start	7%
Our Lady's Inn	5%
Second Chance Career Academy	5%
Pregnancy Resource Center	5%
Trinity Fellowship	4%
Lutheran Child and Family Services	4%
Lemay Child and Family Center	2%
St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition	1%

Program Service Delivery

Family Wellness program facilitators teach from the "Survival Skills for Healthy Families" curriculum, which contains the following six session components:

- Parents in Healthy Families;
- Children in Healthy Families;
- Couples in Healthy Families;
- Change in Healthy Families;
- Solving Family Problems; and
- Passing on Your Values.

Curriculum Components Received by Participants

	Percent (n=216)
Parents in Healthy Families	82%
Children in Healthy Families	51%
Couples in Healthy Families	49%
Change in Healthy Families	38%
Solving Family Problems	35%
Passing on your Values	20%

N=331

In all, most (82%) participants were exposed to the Parents in Healthy Families component, followed by about half who received training in the Children and Couples in Healthy Families components (at 51% and 49%, respectively).

Attendance at the sessions varied by the total number of sessions offered to participants. It appears that, in general, participants showed the most consistent attendance for sessions that were shorter in duration. However, 42% of participants attended all sessions when presented in a four-session format, and 20% of participants attended all sessions when presented in a seven-session format. It should be noted that nearly half of all sessions (45%) were presented in a two-session format (data not shown).

Session Attendance

Total number of sessions offered to participants	Percent who attended all sessions	Average number of sessions attended by participants
1	100%	1.0
2	77%	1.8
3	44%	2.3
4	42%	3.0
6	8%	3.5
7	20%	4.1

Pre-Survey Results

Of the 331 participants who completed pre-surveys, 42 reported that they either did not have children (38) or were not the biological parents of their children (4) (i.e., grandparents or aunts). The following section provides a detailed summary for the remaining 289 participants who have biological children for whom they provided survey data.

Participants were asked to indicate the amount of time that their children reside in their homes with them. As shown in the table on the next page, the majority (67%) reported that their children lived with them "all of the time." One-quarter reported that their children lived with them "some" or "none" of the time, suggesting that these parents do not have primary custody of their children.

Amount of Time that Participants Reside with their Children

	None of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
How much does your child live with you?	13%	12%	9%	67%

N=289

Participants were asked to indicate their comfort levels regarding a number of parenting activities. Nearly all (94% or more) participants reported that they felt "somewhat" or "very" comfortable engaging in the following behaviors:

- Caring for their children;
- Spending time with their children;
- Communicating with their children;
- Making decisions regarding their children; and
- Positively disciplining their children.

Data suggest that at the time of the pre-survey, most participants already felt comfortable in their roles as parents.

Comfort Levels Regarding Parenting Activities

	Very uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Very comfortable	Mean
Caring for my child	3%	1%	9%	88%	3.8
Spending time with my child	2%	2%	8%	88%	3.8
Communicating with my child	3%	1%	15%	81%	3.7
Making decisions regarding my child	2%	4%	16%	78%	3.7
Disciplining my child in a positive way	1%	4%	28%	67%	3.6

N=289

Participants were asked to rate the quality of their relationships with their children's other biological parent. More than half (52%) reported that they would describe those relationships as "good" or "great." However, 32% reported that their relationships were "fair" or "poor" and 16% indicated that the other biological parent has no involvement with the participants or their children, suggesting that sizeable numbers of participants were an appropriate target population for program participation and may benefit from exposure to the Family Wellness curriculum.

Quality of Relationship between Parent Partners

	The other parent is not involved	Poor	Fair	Good	Great
How would you describe your relationship with your child's other parent?	16%	11%	21%	27%	25%

N=289

Of those participants who reported that they have contact with their parent partners (238 participants), more than half (57%) reported that the other parent is "very involved" in their children's lives. One-quarter reported that their parent partners are "rarely involved" or "not involved" in their children's lives.

Parental Involvement of Parent Partners

	Not Involved	Rarely Involved	Somewhat Involved	Very Involved
How involved in your child's life is your child's other biological parent? (n=168)	8%	17%	19%	57%

n=238

Participants who have contact with their parent partners were asked to indicate their levels of comfort during their interactions. Most (81% or more) participants reported that they felt "somewhat" or "very" comfortable interacting and communicating with their children's other parent. However, other areas suggest that participants were an appropriate target population for the Family Wellness program. Forty-one percent reported that they would feel uncomfortable expressing anger toward their children's other parent, 26% reported that they were uncomfortable working through differences, and 22% reported that they were uncomfortable making decisions regarding their children with their parent partners.

Comfort Levels Regarding Interactions with Parent Partners

	Very uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Very comfortable	Mean
Communicating with my child's other parent	10%	9%	33%	49%	3.2
Interacting with my child's other parent	9%	10%	30%	51%	3.2
Making decisions regarding my child with my child's other parent	10%	12%	29%	50%	3.2
Working through differences with my child's other parent	14%	12%	32%	43%	3.0
Expressing anger toward my child's other parent	22%	19%	24%	35%	2.7

n=238

The following section provides a summary of survey items related to participants' documentation for their children. Regarding medical coverage, the majority (65%) of participants reported that their children received medical coverage through the Medicaid program. Smaller numbers of participants' children were covered under their parents' health insurance or had no medical coverage at all.

Medical Coverage for Children

	I pay cash/get billed	I don't know	My child's other parent's health insurance	My health insurance	Medicaid
Who provides medical coverage for your child?	6%	6%	13%	10%	65%

n=238

As shown in the table on the next page, male participants were asked to indicate whether their names were listed on their children's birth certificates. While the majority (70%) responded positively, 21% reported that they were not and 9% were unsure.

Birth Certificate Documentation

	Yes	No	I don't know
Is your name listed on the birth certificate for your child?	70%	21%	9%

n=76 male participants

Regarding paternity testing, 19% of participants reported that paternity tests were used to confirm the biological father of their children. For participants who were not married at the time of the pre-survey, 26% reported that court mandated child support orders were in place for their children.

Paternity and Child Support Documentation

	Yes	No	I don't know
Did you use a paternity test to confirm the biological father of your child?	19%	81%	1%
Do you have court ordered child support for your child?	26%	72%	2%

n=238

For participants who reported that they lived with their children "some" or "none" of the time (63 participants), participants were asked to indicate if they provided monetary and material support to their children's other parent. Of those, three-quarters (78%) reported that they had not provided monetary support to their other parent partner in the 30 days prior to the pre-survey. Of those who did provide monetary support, amounts ranged from \$50 to \$700, for an average payment of \$246.

The majority (77%) also reported that they had not provided material items to their children's other parent in the 30 days prior to the pre-survey. Of those participants who did provide material support, items included clothes, diapers, food, a toddler bed, and additional items that were needed by the children.

Monetary and Material Support Given to the Parent Partner

Do you give your child's other biological parent...	No	Yes
Money to help for your child's expenses? (n=51)	78%	22%
Items such as diapers, clothes, and food? (n=52)	77%	23%

n=63

St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition Part II: Participant Outcomes

Pre- and Post-Survey Comparisons

Since program implementation, 331 participants have completed pre-surveys. Of those, 289 fit the target population of having at least one biological child. In all, 234 participants completed post-surveys (a response rate of 81%) that were matched with pre-surveys to measure changes in comfort levels related to parenting and relationships.

At the time of the post-survey, participants were again asked to rate their comfort levels regarding a number of parenting activities. As shown in the table on the next page, increases occurred in participants' comfort levels engaging in the following behaviors from the time of the pre-survey to the time of the post-survey:

- Caring for their children;
- Spending time with their children;
- Communicating with their children;
- Making decisions regarding their children; and
- Positively disciplining their children.

Data suggest that participants increased their levels of comfort toward parenting during the time that they participated in the program.

Change in Comfort Levels Regarding Parenting Activities

	Pre-survey mean	Post-survey mean	% change
Caring for my child (n=206)	3.8	3.9	+1
Spending time with my child (n=209)	3.8	3.9	+1
Communicating with my child (n=208)	3.7	3.8	+1
Making decisions regarding my child (n=205)	3.7	3.8	+1
Disciplining my child in a positive way (n=204)	3.6	3.7	+1

N=234

Participants who reported that they have contact with their parent partners were asked at the time of the post-survey to indicate their levels of comfort during those interactions. Average responses to four out of five survey items remained consistent from the time of the pre-survey to the time of the post-survey; however, there was an increase (+.1) in the number of participants who reported that they felt comfortable working through differences with their children's other parent.

Change in Comfort Levels Regarding Interactions with Parent Partners

	Pre-survey mean	Post-survey mean	% change
Working through differences with my child's other parent (n=154)	3.0	3.1	+1
Interacting with my child's other parent (n=160)	3.3	3.3	--
Communicating with my child's other parent (n=160)	3.2	3.2	--
Expressing anger toward my child's other parent (n=157)	2.7	2.7	--
Making decisions regarding my child with my child's other parent	3.2	3.2	--

n=178

Participants who were not married at the time of the post-survey were asked to what extent they believed that their participation in the Family Wellness program would improve their ability to work with their children's other parent for financial support. The majority (64%) reported that they believed their participation would improve their ability to work with their child's other parent "some" or "a lot."

Participant Perceptions of Program Benefits upon Relationships with Parent Partners

	Not at all	A little	Some	A lot
To what extent do you believe your participation will improve your ability to work with your child's other parent for financial support of your child? (n=134)	26%	10%	21%	43%

Participants provided a variety of responses to support the extent to which they felt the program would improve their interactions. While some believed their program participation would be beneficial, others reported that they did not expect to receive any additional financial support from their parent partners, regardless of having participated in the Family Wellness classes. Specific comments regarding what participants believed they had gained from participating in the program and how that might translate into improved relationships with their parent partners include the following:

- *This program supplied me with different ways of communicating with my child's parent.*
- *I have learned to listen to what he might have to say.*
- *I now know how to work out our issues in different ways.*
- *I am learning to be more level-headed in my decision making with my child's other parent.*
- *We never talked before and now we do, so I can use this information to get a deeper understanding of where he is coming from.*
- *I've learned to calm down and think before I yell.*
- *I don't currently ask for any [child support from my child's other parent], but this program may allow me to ask for what I need without feeling bad.*
- *I have a tendency to shut down when [my parent partner] gets angry. I am learning how to speak up and get things off of my mind.*
- *I usually brush him off, but now I will take more time to listen.*
- *To gain an understanding on why I should make an effort to heal has meant a lot to me.*
- *Instead of criticizing [my child's other parent] about his responsibilities as a parent, I can now let him know how I feel. I will say what I want, listen, and cooperate.*

While some participants reported that they already had good relationships with their parent partners, others were not as positive. Specific comments regarding why program participation might not impact participants' relationships with their parent partners include the following:

- *Financial support is not an issue with my child's father. We work great together on this.*
- *He gives me what our daughter needs and wants already.*
- *We already know what we need to do. We are both in this situation and we are both learning from it.*
- *I'm not sure anything will make him take care of his kids.*
- *My child's parent does not always have a job or want to help with our child.*

Specific comments from non-custodial parents regarding insight they gained from program participation include the following:

- *I now realize how difficult it is to take care of the children with me not staying with them.*
- *I really want to sit down with my kids one-on-one and see how they feel about things.*
- *It taught me to be a better father and a better man.*
- *It made me realize that children need attention.*
- *I learned how to exchange dialogue without fighting.*
- *I now feel more capable to talk to the mother of my children.*

All participants, regardless of marital status or whether they had biological children, were asked to indicate if they felt that their relationships with others will be improved as a result of their participation in the program. As shown in the table below, most (84%) reported that they believed their relationships with others would improve "some" or "a lot."

Participant Perceptions of Program Benefits upon Relationships with Others

	Not at all	A little	Some	A lot
To what extent do you believe your relationships with others will be improved as a result of your program participation? (n=224)	6%	10%	36%	48%

Participants provided a variety of responses regarding how they believed their program participation would impact their relationships with others. Specific comments include the following:

- *I have gained more confidence and self-esteem.*
- *I will be less frustrated with my children and not feel so stressed out when I don't get the results that I want.*
- *It has helped me to evaluate who I am and what I need to say before I respond to someone. I'll think before I speak.*
- *My child's father and I can now begin working on sticking together when making decisions.*
- *I now know that my children gauge my love by the time that I am willing to spend with them.*
- *I now know how to deal with others without causing so many problems or without using violence.*
- *I am now ready to listen to other people.*
- *I now know how to discipline without being physical.*
- *I can express what I want and stop letting others decide for me.*
- *I have learned about getting along and having respect. All people don't have to think alike.*

Finally, participants were asked to indicate skills that they had learned as a result of program participation. Responses varied from interpersonal skills to parenting skills and include the following:

- Adult relationship skills;
- Communication skills;
- Listening skills;
- Cooperation;
- Disciplining in a positive way, including alternatives to physical discipline;
- Speaking up for themselves and staying in charge of situations; and
- Consistent rule setting.

Pre- and Post-Survey Results Summary

To date, 234 participants have completed both pre- and post-surveys (a response rate of 81%) which measured changes in comfort levels related to parenting and relationships. In addition, surveys assessed participant satisfaction with program services. Data gathered from participants at the time of the pre- and post-surveys support the following positive outcomes:

- An increase in participants' comfort levels engaging in the following behaviors:

- Caring for their children;
 - Spending time with their children;
 - Communicating with their children;
 - Making decisions regarding their children; and
 - Positively disciplining their children.
- The majority (64%) of participants reported that they believed their participation in the Family Wellness program would improve their abilities to work with their children's other parent for financial support "some" or "a lot."
 - Most (84%) participants reported that they believed their relationships with others would improve "some" or "a lot" as a result of program participation.

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Data suggest that the Family Wellness program is making progress toward the program objectives of improved relationships between parents and their children, increased parental involvement with their children, and decreased number of adversarial relationships between parent partners.