

## Promoting Child Well-Being and Safety:

# Promising Practices for Encouraging Child Health and Safety via Integration of Relationship Education Focused on Encouraging Healthy Couple, Co-Parenting, and Marital Relationships

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**Operator:** Please stand by, we are about to begin. Good day, and welcome to the Promoting Child Well-Being and Safety, Promising Practices for Encouraging Child Health and Safety conference call. Today's conference is being recorded. At this time I would like to turn the conference to Miss Andrea Strahan. Please go ahead.

**Andrea Strahan:** Thanks so much and hello, everyone. I'd like to welcome you to the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families Webinar entitled Promoting Child Well-Being and Safety: Promising Practices for Encouraging Child Health and Safety via Integration of Relationship Education Focused on Encouraging Healthy Couple, Co-Parenting and Marital Relationships.

My name is Andrea Strahan and I am part of the Resource Center team. I'd like to thank everyone for joining us today. Before we get started with the presentations, there are a few housekeeping items I'd like to go over. Just to let everyone know, we will be taking questions at the end of the presentation but we encourage you to submit any questions that you have throughout the duration of the webinar.

To do this, find the question and answer pane, designated by the letters Q and A on the top left portion of your screen. You can click on that portion of the menu bar to open the pane, or you can open the pane and drag it off the menu bar to display it as a stand-alone box. Type your question into the top box and then click the 'ask' button. You'll receive an automatic reply thanking you for your question. This will free up your question and answer pane which allows you to ask another question if you choose.

This presentation, a transcript and a question and answer document will be posted to our website, [healthymarriageandfamilies.org](http://healthymarriageandfamilies.org), within about 10 business days. If at any time, you would like to view the presentation full screen, please press the F5 button. You can hit the Escape button or the F5 button again to return to normal view.

Our speakers today will be Robyn Cenizal, Ted Futris, Debra Gilmore, and John Barner, staff at the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families. And our special guest presenter today will be Connie Schlittler, Chief Information Officer, Information Services Division, Oklahoma Department of Human Services. So with that, I will go ahead and turn the call over to Robyn Cenizal, Project Director here at the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families. Robyn?

**Robyn Cenizal:** Thanks, Andrea. And again, on behalf of the team, welcome to this afternoon's Webinar. As Andrea mentioned, we will have a question and answer session at the end,

but feel free to type in your questions so that you don't forget them as we go through our presentations.

So let me start by telling you what today's goals and objectives are. We plan to describe promising practices for integrating healthy marriage and relationship education into services that promote child safety. We also plan to share strategies and examples on how to develop a plan of action for integrating those skills and we will also be describing how the National Resource Center can assist you with that integration.

At the National Resource Center for Health Marriage and Families our mission is connecting healthy marriage education skills and safety net services as an integrated approach to strengthening families. So what does that mean?

Well when we think about safety net service providers, we think about all of the agencies that you see represented in this diagram. We think about all of these as safety nets that are there to serve families who are either attempting to gain self-sufficiency, regain self-sufficiency, or simply to maintain their status.

We also promote healthy marriage and relationship education skills as skills that are transferrable in helping these families to not only move their family along, but also to get and maintain jobs and other strategies.

So what do we offer at the Resource Center? We offer resource that supports and promotes the integration of these healthy marriage education skills. Skills like communication, conflict resolution, and critical skills like parenting and financial literacy.

We also offer resources, tips, and tools, to use and to share with the families that you serve. And we provide training and technical assistance to support stakeholders like you as you work to implement these integration strategies.

We're going to talk more about these strategies and offer some examples of some things that have already been done. And to get you started on your journey today, I'm going to turn it over to Ted.

**Ted Futris:** Thank you, Robyn, and good afternoon, everybody. As we get started, I wanted to first provide an overview of, you know, why is this even important? Why do we want to focus on helping facilitating the promotion of healthy couple and marital relationships?

And research is very clear in terms of the benefits of healthy couple and marital relations on children's health and safety, as well as the adults. You know, personal skills are essential to effective parenting and marital relationships. There is often debate in the research world regarding what's more important, family structure versus process.

And I think the research is fairly clear that process really matters more. Regardless of what your family structure is, that how parents get along with each other, both as co-parents, as couples, has quite an impact on children's well-being.

But we also know that on average, children who grow up in healthy coupled, married households on average do far better on a variety of outcomes compared to children who grow up in non-married, single households. And we know that children are experiencing

a lot of transition in their lives and so our goal here is to help foster those healthy, those skills that help promote effective parenting as well as marital relationships, to reinforce and promote stability for children.

Caregivers in healthy relationships serve as better models for their youth. Unfortunately, we have a lot of young people today who are being exposed to divorce, the prevalence of divorce still remains high, 40 to 45% of first marriages still end in divorce. We also see a continuous rise in out of wedlock childbearing. Children who are growing up in never married households.

And so, unfortunately a lot of children don't have some of these models for what healthy relationships might look like. And by helping caregivers, whether it be biological parents, foster parents, adopting parents, develop and understand what healthy relationship skills are and how to have healthy relationships, can provide some of these youth with the models they need to form their own healthy relationships in the future.

Caregivers, also educating relationship education may help improve children's overall health as well as help reduce instances of child abuse and neglect. Research is very clear. The quality of a couple and marital relationship directly impacts the quality of parenting.

There's a clear spill over. Mom and Dad get along, Mom and Dad are also, in turn, better parents. And when they're better parents, their children fare better than children whose parents do not get along and do not exhibit those positive parenting skills. And so we - research is very clear about the benefits of healthy couple and marital relationships on children as well as parents.

And so what we're trying to do here with the National Resource Center is work with agencies, stakeholders like yourselves on this call, that work with caregivers, whether it be biological parents, foster parents, adopting parents, or professionals that work with these families to establish where you are in terms of the integration of relationship and marriage education, and where you want to be in terms of integrating this type of service and education and training into the services you already provide.

And so we break it down to three levels. Level 1 is basic engagement. You know, at the minimum our hope is to inspire you to share resources whether it be in your office setting, waiting rooms, literature that parents can pick up and read for themselves and learn more about what healthy relationships are, what skills are required to maintain healthy and stable marriages and homes for children.

And then we hope that at Level 2, some of you might know of community partners that you can work with that maybe you don't have the capacity to provide the service yourself, but you have partners in the community, like for example cooperative extension, family and consumer science educators, who can come in and teach some parenting classes.

Teach co-parenting and couple and marital relationship classes where these skills can be learned, like communicate managing conflict, communicating effectively, so you bring those partners into the services you offer or have partners that you can refer your families to.

For example, if you have a family who's going through the adoption process, having someone they can go to talk about how that process is going to influence their relationship, their marriage and factoring that in as they take in the responsibilities of caring for this new child.

And then Level 3, we hope that many of you will move towards it, which involves full integration. For example, training your staff to offer and integrate relationship education into the services that you already provide. Learning about what those skills are and tools they can use to teach caregivers healthy relationship skills, communication, conflict, parenting, managing finances, dealing with conflict that comes with managing finances. And give them some one-on-one direction, whether it's in a group setting or in a one-on-one home visit setting.

And so just to illustrate for you again what the three levels of integration include, for example at Level 1, I mentioned handouts in waiting rooms that promote healthy relationships or other available community resources that support family safety.

Level 2, identifying those partners that you can refer clients to or bring to the classes and workshops that you offer. Maybe you're doing a parenting class for parents after divorce. And, you know, how do you effectively co-parent after divorce? Well, bring in an expert who can help them understand how to manage the conflict that might arise.

But also take it a step further, they're likely to form future relationships with others and form step-families. So do you have an expert or resource in the community who can come in and help them understand how to build future relationships that will be healthier and more stable than maybe their first marriage?

Level 3, full integration and training your staff. And there might be resources in your community that you can turn to for training, but we also hope by the end of this call you'll see the National Resource Center as a resource that you can turn to for training, for curricula, and for technical assistance to help move you towards the full integration of healthy marriage and relationship education into the services you provide.

With that, I'm going to turn it over to Debra, who's going to talk about family safety.

**Debra Gilmore:** Thanks, Ted. Most of you are serving low income folks, you know what's now on your screen, you're ultra-familiar with these statistics about poverty and intimate partner violence and child maltreatment, how they're all interrelated and they all correlate to negative health and well-being outcomes.

This is really sort of the opposite spectrum. It's the gloom and doom image of what happens when you don't have healthy relationships and healthy families. And I say spectrum on purpose because we're really when we're talking about family safety, talking about a wide range of issues and concerns that jeopardize safety.

And some of those are visible, immediately visible, some of them are not, sometimes things cause problems over time or emotional and developmental injuries both to a direct victim to maybe witnessing children, to children themselves more directly.

And there are things that are situational for example, a work schedule change that maybe causes someone to lash out physically or emotionally against a partner or make a decision, not one that we would necessarily support, but make a decision in a tough situation to leave a child home alone over night.

These issues of poverty, intimate partner violence, and child maltreatment with the numbers that you're seeing in the millions are some of the common threads that we tend to see on the negative side.

But these numbers, I think, also show with 15 million children living in poverty and a lesser amount of people being victims of intimate partner violence and being referred to child protective services, these numbers also show us that not every family living in poverty is involved in family violence or neglect.

Again, there's a wide spectrum of folks that you're really serving, all of whom can benefit, including ourselves, from enhanced relationships. If you would, this is, no, I'm sorry. Andrea, you were correct I was moving too fast.

This is a poll that I'd like you guys to weigh in on, if you're sitting with a group if you would just kind of quickly poll your group and see where you come out. Women initiate violence in relationships as much as men do. We'll just give you all two more seconds. You all should be able to see the results as well. Just a talking point for some later slides and among yourselves later as well.

Okay, so we're really split on where we think the statistics lie. And if you didn't get a chance to weigh in that's okay, thank you for participating and wherever you landed even if it was just in thinking about it in your head. If you did think to yourselves or say to me, you know, in your head or out loud - well it really depends on what you mean by violence. You're absolutely right. So I'm not surprised that those numbers came out somewhere in between.

We also need to bear in mind that researchers and people who look at statistics all have different definitions of child maltreatment, intimate partner violence, and that affects how those statistics come out. So different studies have looked at the concept differently and this is one particular study that tried to take an overall look.

This is a study that was done by Dr. Murray Straus in 1999. I'm sorry, it was actually an article by him looking at a wide range of studies. The first column, the family conflict studies, he compared and then just synthesized more than a hundred of what he categorized as these family conflict studies.

He compared them to four solid crime studies that are often cited. So generally speaking, the crime studies relied on a definition of domestic violence that meant a crime or that meant a physical injury. Whereas the family conflict studies, those were generally self-reports and they used something to get there called the conflict tactics scale. In essence, they measured fights in relationships.

So they measured things that involved hitting, slapping, and other activities without necessarily focusing on the injury. And so there are three take-aways from this table overall. The first is that crime studies generally mean that there's a physical injury, so

when you're looking at the studies, that's what you're looking at, something that was reported, generally speaking, to the police.

And so missing from that, you may know that emotional abuse can be just as damaging as physical injuries and you're not necessarily capturing that in the crime studies. So note in the bottom row that there's figures that when you look at the crime studies are higher than that first one, 13 to 1, 7 to 1. That's the ratio of violence initiated by males compared to females.

And it's much higher when you're looking at those crime studies than it is when you're looking at family conflict studies. So males in those studies are much more likely to be the ones initiating the violence, or that's what the study tells you, anyway.

So point number two is that we need to be aware of both serious, so the things that come out in physical injuries in crime, immediately serious and pervasive violence in relationships and what that looks like, but we also want to make sure that we are aware of what conflict that does not rise to the level of a crime looks like, so that we can be ready to integrate appropriate prevention and intervention protocols, both of those into the Safety Net services, so (inaudible) that means giving people the tools and the skills to have healthy relationships.

The final thing I just want to point out is the upper left box, the 10% to 35%, and just mention to you that the lower figure, the 10% of assault rate in the family conflict studies, that lower figure is for marital relationship studies. And I mentioned this if you were on the last webinar, that multiple studies show that violence is much more prevalent in dating relationships than it is in marital ones overall.

And one final note on that and that is that there's also evidence, though, that young married couples are even more likely than dating couples to experience violence in their relationships. So all just sort of things to keep in mind when you're trying to decide what your integration should look like.

But as Ted said, you don't need to start with jumping in with both feet. One simple way, when he talked about basic engagement, one simple way to do that, as he mentioned, is just to have pamphlets that are handy on healthy relationships that give very practical tips on what that looks like and what you can do to enhance it.

And you will, by the way, find in our Resource Center, you can search on things like tips and those sorts of things will come up for you in our resource library and Robyn will talk more about the resources available towards the end of our Webinar.

Family safety curriculum in the unit is another way, and by the way, this can also mean that you are integrating within in your training for staff in your own agencies and organizations. Units that not only talk about what family safety look like but what healthy relationships look like. We want to make sure that we're taking care of ourselves as well as the people that we serve and so a lot of the information is certainly valuable across both of those groups of people.

And finally, the last goal is really just coming back to that idea of having both prevention and intervention strategies. So you might, as you're moving into full integration, look at having some sort of risk assessment model where the way that you respond, depending

again on how much interaction you have with your clients, what your response is from handing out a pamphlet to having a partnership with someone who can bring in healthy relationship education, or whether your response is immediately referring someone to Child Protective Services, to a domestic violence shelter.

All of those ranges of things can be based on a risk assessment that gives you sort of a tool or a guideline for discussion among yourselves about what the best solution for a particular individual is. With that, I'm going to turn things over to our special guest presenter, Connie Schlittler.

**Connie Schlittler:** Thank you, very much, for inviting me to participate on the Webinar today. It's a great pleasure to provide information on the Oklahoma programs and the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative.

I wanted to provide just a brief thumbnail sketch of how the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative was created. In 1998 there was a study by Oklahoma State University and they really looked at what were the factors that were causing Oklahoma's poor economy. Out of that study, some things were identified that were really social indicators, high divorce rate, high out of wedlock birthrate, as well as, interestingly enough on our topic today, child deaths due to child abuse.

So really, Oklahoma Marriage Initiative focused on child safety and well-being really from the beginning and realizing that a high divorce rate, high out of wedlock birth can contribute to child death and lack of safety in the home.

So 14 years later, the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative has become a broad based social service prevention program based on research. And I just want to comment on Ted's earlier slide about the safety net. We've really got strategies to try and address individuals who receive services in each of those programs and trying to figure out ways how we can serve them.

To date, more than 300,000 individuals have participated in the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative and that's close to 10% of the state's population. So we've had great success and we're going to talk about some of the things that we've done through the program.

Now this particular slide I'll probably spend the most time on. So I'll talk about the decisions that we made early on that continue to influence how we promote child safety and well-being.

First of all, early on in the program Oklahoma decided to use the PREP curriculum, the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program. This was selected early on since it was a research based curriculum and it was shown to be effective in strengthening marriages and preventing divorce.

Of course, all of these programs, as Ted said, result in improving relationships and can improve child well-being and safety. So my first bullet on Within My Reach is that PREP curriculum was modified for the clients who received the TANF program. So I think this was particularly interesting for today's call about how this has been integrated into our TANF program.

And we see that working with these clients in that program we have a key opportunity to help them with their children, obviously they're the caregivers, parents of children in the TANF program, and this is a great opportunity to work for them. Participation in the class does count towards work participation, it's a 12 hour class.

I just want to make a note too that we work closely with the domestic violence coalition in Oklahoma, they are very supportive of the program. And part of this Within My Reach curriculum was developed with a strong and clear message about domestic violence and safety throughout the curriculum.

We know this is an issue and we really want to help men and women who are on the TANF program have the benefit of that safety education around domestic violence. And again, as we said, this promotes child safety and well-being.

Another thing that we do, which is listed as retreat based interventions, we do special programs for child welfare resource families, that would be our foster and adoptive parents, through marriage retreats. We also offer these retreats to families that we see as high risk families in Oklahoma and our OKDHS staff, that's our Oklahoma Department of Human Services staff, refer clients to voluntarily participate in these retreats.

These have been funded through the Administration for Children and Families, and we are very grateful for their participation, and we really look at those high need families. So other target populations for the retreats include grandparents raising grandchildren, couples with step-children, military couples, couples caring for children with special needs, and others. So that's another one that we feel like we've done a good job of engaging those couples and families in marriage and relationship education.

Finally, I want to talk about family expectations, which also, again, all of these have at the core the PREP curriculum. But the Family Expectations program is the only marriage relationship, parent education program in the country to really prove its effectiveness with two rigorous national evaluations.

And so when I talk about the Oklahoma story I felt like it would be negligent of me not to share what we found out with Family Expectations because I think the elements of the program are things that folks can consider and states can consider in their decisions to do marriage and relationship education.

So we target, in this program, pregnant couples, either married or non-married. They can also have a newborn baby, I think within the first six months. So these folks are referred from Medicaid providers or Department of Human Services, we certainly work with OB/GYNs in the state to really refer couples to this program. The curriculum is modified for expectant parents.

We just see this time of birth - first of all these kids are the most vulnerable from a child welfare perspective and they need a lot of safety, obviously, a newborn. And so that's one of the reasons. We also know that this is a good time to engage couples because they're more likely to commit and work on their relationship and improve. So I think that's part of the elements that make this program successful.

The other things that are in the curriculum, and again, we talked about this in some of the other discussion. We have parenting, infant care, child support, all of those things

that young families are interested in hearing about. And then some of the things, again, the states might be interested in including in their programs, we have incentives for participation. These are very powerful. That if you come to the classes, come to the groups, or even an individual session, you may be able to get diapers or a car seat over time for participation in the program.

We provide childcare which I think is a big issue, obviously, for families with children. Case management, and by that I mean just that whole psycho-social approach to the family. Do they need a job? Do they need help with transportation? And again, this is a great place even for TANF programs who can help families with these situations.

We have a centralized services center to help serve those families. And then just ongoing support so once they complete the program they've graduated, they still can come back for programs and services, I think for about a year, after they've completed the program. So again, this program and its elements could be replicated, or maybe I should say should be replicated to improve child safety and well-being during this vulnerable time of a child's life.

So some of the tips that I have on program integration - one of the things that we've done from the very beginning when the Department of Human Services became involved in the Marriage Initiative was using our TANF funding to support our efforts throughout the state. So that gives us a basis for funding that's stable, that's not a short term grant but actually an ongoing source of support.

Secondly, by building the program permanently into the TANF program we've got our existing DHS staff to deliver the classes. So I think this provides a lot of support to those families. This is not a caseload that increasing but a lot of individuals go through the TANF program each year as they become unemployed, need the assistance, and so we have an opportunity to reach a lot of folks through the TANF program.

And then the next bullet is the public private partnership. Of course there's close coordination between the state and the private organization that coordinates the Oklahoma marriage initiative. And so for us, privatization has resulted in a lot of the efficiencies just in terms of their flexibility and staffing, applying for grants, et cetera. And I'm going to link this to the next point, that really the program in Oklahoma is designed around volunteer delivery of program.

So our contractor for the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative spends a lot of time training volunteers throughout the state. Our dollars would not go nearly enough to reach all the folks in the community that need these services. So having volunteers, as well as in these safety net programs where we've trained staff to deliver the program, those are not TANF dollars being used to deliver the program, but actually those programs have committed their staff to learn the curriculum and provide it.

So I think that's very helpful. Today we've had 3500 volunteers trained and again, as I've said these are programs offered throughout the state. So let me go to my next slide.

So these are the challenges of integration. I know many of the states have been in the same situation that we have been in in the last few years, just by financial reductions in state funding have caused us to reduce funding for this program, as with I would say all

programs, at the Department of Human Services. So we need that good funding base to maintain the program.

What happens as well, and my second bullet point, is there's turnover in our trained staff as well as volunteers. So the training program that we offer is a key part of the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, to keep the curriculum fresh. We do refresher courses so even people who have been delivering it over time, we update the curriculum and get that information distributed out, and bringing in new staff and new volunteers.

Another issue, and this may be true in many human services agencies around the nation, is we just have fewer staff but our caseloads are larger than they've ever been in the history of the agency. So that creates obviously, a lot of problems. Our overall workforce has been reduced by 9% in the past 10 years.

And I suspect, in particular the TANF program, the SNAP program that probably even greater than 9%. But our caseload, for example, in the SNAP program has increased by 84% during that same period of time. So the caseloads are huge. It's very, very hard for staff to go, okay now I'm going to sit down and deliver a program, you know, a 12 hour program.

So those have been some of the challenges in just continuing to work with our TANF staff, particularly, as well as the point was made earlier, our community volunteers who we can refer clients to receive this programming.

Another issue, and as you saw my title earlier, I'm the chief information officer for the agency, many services throughout the nation are being delivered without a face-to-face intervention anymore. We're putting more and more services in Oklahoma online and I think that'll continue to create a challenge as we go to more call-in support centers and online services. Because I think those opportunities to engage our clients in relationships education programs, I think it's helpful to have a face-to-face meeting. And time to talk to them. And share this material. So just our lessons for success.

Of course I'm a data person as I said. I think there is a value to really monitoring the work. We have systems where people report how many individuals receive the curriculum. I think that builds public and private support for the program if you can say 300,000 Oklahomans have participated. These are the groups that are getting the curriculum.

As well as monitoring what types of groups they are. Is it a domestic violence group program? Is it in the TANF program? Because if we see that some populations are, you know, dropping off, they're not being served like they once were, then we can provide additional training and outreach to those sectors of the community.

Again, I mentioned this earlier all repeated again, just that ongoing training of staff and volunteers is critical to our success. Again, people leave the system. Volunteers do it for a certain period of time and then discontinue the program. So I think having regular classes, regular opportunities for volunteers and staff to participate in the training, and learn how to deliver the curriculum, that helps us a lot.

And it helps us with the fidelity to the model. And our clients are more likely to get a better dose if it's provided by someone that's a good trainer, understands the curriculum, and provided in a good way.

And I want to say, maybe this is the most important point, you've got to have the commitment of state leadership. We would not have the successes that we've had to date if it were not for leaders who really understand the value of the program. Particularly around the issue were talking about today, child safety and well-being.

And I think sometimes that becomes political when we talk about marriage. But if you focus on the fact that it promotes child safety and well-being, a lot of the politics go out the window, because all of us agree that that's an important issue. I think linking the benefits of relationships education to children and their families creates a good case for funding these programs and making them part of an integrated service delivery model for health and human services.

Again, we are under tremendous financial stress throughout the nation. And I know that in Oklahoma as well and we've got to set priorities. So I think presentations like today about how this will help our children, help the future of these families, is very important.

So finally, I want to just talk a little bit more on our family expectations. Again, my role at the Department of Human Services is also with a research hat. So we know there are benefits to the Family Expectations Program. The research showed that couples were more likely to stay together and their relationships have improved.

Noteworthy is as well is there was less psychological and physical abuse from their spouses, both men and women in the Family Expectations Program reported less psychological and physical abuse in their relationships.

So these are just really important outcomes from our program. There is higher-level of marital happiness, lower levels of marital distress, greater warmth and support, more positive communication, fewer negative behaviors and emotions in their interactions with their spouses.

So again, that's just kind of a quick recap of some of the research on the Family Expectations Program. I hope you learn more and look forward to taking your questions this afternoon. I'm going to turn it over to John.

**John Barner:** Thank you, so much, Connie. What I'll be talking about today is just some of the lessons, challenges, and strategies for integration that were shared during the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families Peer to Peer Network forum, which was held in Washington DC on July 18th and 19th of this year.

The purpose for convening the forum was for federal, regional, state, tribal and county safety net stakeholders to just share some challenges, experiences, and successful strategies employed, like Connie's example, to strengthen the integration of healthy marriage and relationships education and skills into their existing service provision.

And what I'd like to begin with today is to talk a little bit about building effective partnerships. Communication between agencies within agencies, and between levels of

government, can be a huge challenge. But can also create successful integration opportunities. The success really lies, our stakeholders said, in establishing a type of network whether formal or informal, that works for the needs of the agencies involved.

And the first step with that is connecting with schools, community organizations, child care providers. Community organizations can be a huge asset that are often untapped. And community partners can include faith-based organizations, nonprofit schools, other professionals that can provide resources, ideas and connections to make integration a success.

Potential partners can range from large agencies to small organizations, or even individuals who are passionate about family safety and well-being. Some stakeholders chose to plan meetings or forums to include all of their partners to keep everyone informed on the same page, and to explain and discuss their shared goals.

Also our stakeholders talked about engaging families. Including families or individuals to serve as partners, especially those who have successfully completed the program or gone through a curricula, can provide a valuable perspective. These families or individuals that are receiving, or have received, relationship and marriage education or skills, understand what other families are going through. And they may be able to spread that information about a program, or a new curriculum, through word-of-mouth, which is a one of the most effective recruitment tools.

Engaging providers of other services are also great partnership opportunities, because you can collaborate. Very often two partners may find that they've been using skills from different curricula and may want to combine them, or look at the research and what the research shows, to provide the best services they possibly can.

And then of course there are others in the community who want to serve as champions because they are passionate about the issues, and they may want to volunteer in some capacity. Or receive training themselves in order to spread the word throughout the community or a geographic area.

To build this kind of community support, the first step is information sharing. One barrier that stakeholders that the forum identified was that sharing information with the state, or with families, could often be difficult. It was hard to coordinate something among a complex system of agencies, departments, and people.

Participants suggested several promising practices including formal or informal meetings, having celebrations of successes, inviting families and individuals being served, partners, champions, facilitators and leaders, to just create an event where everyone was involved together to inform that group about the successes they were having. Or a particular integration step they wanted to plan for the future.

Communication can be difficult. But one way to overcome the obstacle is to use technology to make that connection across services and service providers. One strategy that was mentioned that the forum was creating Internet list serves for the express purpose of sharing information among partnering agencies, or individuals.

Bringing up the topic when talking to others within the network, and then creating an action plan for building communication bridges can be the first steps to making the leap towards integration.

And then finally, educating supporters - educating directors of agencies, state legislature, the governor, the mayor, other high level officials to receive their support can make, as Connie mentioned, all the difference. Putting a face to the cause can create a connection that may lead to very strong partnership or supports. Now this may require a lot of legwork, phone calls, face-to-face conversations, and will certainly require more time, but maybe worth it in the support received.

Crafting the message - the message that agencies send to peers and partners can create greater support, more understanding of the goals, and develop long-standing integrated relationships. By developing relationships with peers and partners, agency representatives and staff can personalize the message, tailor information to a particular partner's interest, a particular resource or service provision, or specific needs.

This can be done by using effective strategies, such as presentations, handouts, video testimonies testimonials, or by sharing statistics. All of which fall within the Level 1, Level 2 of integration, but provide an effective base, or foundation, for full integration for Level 3.

Letting the public know that it's a community effort, and not just a singular agency effort, or one person's job, can really encourage potential participants and partners to get involved. There are numerous ways to market a program and an initiative. But advertising can be costly. Several stakeholders suggested starting at the grassroots level and allowing word-of-mouth participation and communication drive the effort forward.

When creating an effective message to families or other participants, it's important to stress the idea of recruitment and retention. Many stakeholders agree that handouts, such as tip sheets, and fact sheets, need to be simple and easy to read to include that larger audience of participants. Agencies may also want to let families and participants know that they're interested in their feedback, so that they have a voice in driving at the initiative or particular curricula forward.

When integrating healthy marriage and relationship education and skills into services centered on family safety and well-being, this may be the result of strong collaboration and partners' effective communication and mass messaging, and buy-in from all levels of agencies, staff, and government.

It's important to focus and centralize these efforts into a strategic plan. Many of the stakeholders present at the forum said that a strong strategic plan, once it's built, can really have momentum and push people forward giving people clear, measurable goals, and assist in monitoring and continuing to build on those goals for future actions.

Service providers may also need to direct participants to resources that take care of special circumstances. Or address basic needs, such as safety, food, shelter, and health care, before attempting to educate them on healthy marriage and relationships. Special circumstances may include areas like safety, literacy, health and mental health, poverty,

homelessness, substance abuse, and intimate partner violence, as Debra mentioned today.

In order to reach diverse populations, agency representatives stressed at the forum that you need to know your audience. This can include being flexible with curricula or conducting research into cultures. Different cultures that may see marriage and family in different ways so it's important to continue to educate staff and volunteers on these important differences.

In aligning curricula with community needs, stakeholders identified finding an ambassador or another type of champion to serve between agencies and the diverse families they serve. Several stakeholders identified that finding skilled facilitators and the right curricula were very, very important to ongoing integration efforts. Facilitators who were, in their words, equipped, comfortable, committed, and passionate.

For many agencies facilitators and staff are spread throughout a state or region and that can create several barriers. Budgets oftentimes did not allow for travel for facilitators, or for staff for training. Time constraints are also mentioned as a challenging factor. To overcome those obstacles stakeholders address some of the top following key practices.

Use of technology. Even doing trainings by e-mail. Providing ongoing motivation for facilitators, you heard Connie mentioned that. Having that constant presence, keeping training going, offering training for special populations, or information sessions on special topics like the impact of domestic violence or poverty in a particular area, can continue to motivate. They can continue to serve as tools for recruitment, retention, open up avenues for new partnerships, and solidify integration efforts.

So I'd like to now bring up two of our survey questions. These survey questions are very important for us to continue to develop new and exciting Webinar topics for you. This first one is, I understand ways to overcome challenges and barriers to integration of relationship education into my agencies service delivery. I'll give you a few seconds to put your vote in.

Okay, we'll move onto a second survey question. I understand steps that my agency or program can take in order to integrate relationship education into our services.

Okay, now that we've seen some background information and discussions around implementation, challenges to integration, and opportunities for collaboration and partnership, I'd like to turn it over to Robyn who will highlight tools and projects available through the Resource Center to support your integration efforts.

**Robyn Cenizal:** Thanks, John. And thank you to the rest of our presenters today. Especially you, Connie, thank you for all that great information about Oklahoma. So I can imagine many of you on the call listening to Oklahoma talk about their comprehensive programming and case management, and state leadership support, I can imagine that many of you are not quite ready to take on the whole state.

So let's think about how the Resource Center can support you where you are now, as you move towards perhaps maybe considering the goal of taking on a whole state, and integrating healthy relationship if education. So the Resource Center, as you can see here, here is what you it looks like when you go to the website. It's very easy to navigate very toolkit oriented, not a lot of text but lots of good resources.

And I will tell you that we did not try to reinvent the wheel. So if there is a resource that we think would be helpful to you on another website we have linked to that resource instead of trying to gather all that information and move it on to our website.

One of the other things that you'll find when you go and you look at the left navigation bar, you'll see success stories. If you click on that you'll hear about some successes that are happening in other states, for example, Utah and their efforts to integrate relationship education into all 95 of the high schools. So that information is there as well.

So also, we heard Connie talk about the importance of gaining leadership support at the state level. We also heard John talk about that is one of the steps that many of our stakeholders brought up when we had the forum. Well we can help you with that. On this particular page you can see research and statistics. And a couple of the products that are mentioned here, research pieces, Why Marriage Matters, also one of my favorites, The Taxpayers Cost of Divorce and Unwed Child Bearing.

It's a great report that not only talks about the fact that family fragmentation costs the U.S. taxpayers \$112 billion, but it also breaks down as statistics by state, which can be very helpful to you in communicating with local leadership the importance of integrating healthy relationship education skills.

Also down below you will see one on Marriage and Family Wellness, Corporate America's Business. That particular piece is very helpful in promoting the integration of relationship education skills as it supports economic development and increased employment.

So both of those are some of the tools that we can offer you to assist you in having those conversations. Maybe those conversations start with local leadership, maybe they just start within your agency, but helping to educate your colleagues, first educating yourself and then educating your colleagues on the value of healthy marriage education skills as part of an integrated holistic approach to starting families.

You'll also see on here program development partnership. We heard Connie talk about partnerships. We also heard John mention that others at the forum talked about partnerships. Not only does this site offer information about selecting appropriate partnerships, it also talks about managing those partners and offers examples of MOUs, memorandums of understanding, and other partnership agreements tools that you might use to manage those relationships as you develop them.

There is also information on the Resource Center about other curriculum. We heard Connie talk about what they're using, PREP curriculum, in Oklahoma. But there are other curriculums that are available. We are in the process of developing a product that will actually highlight curriculum that is either free or low-cost that might be appropriate for you to consider for integration.

There are also fact sheets, tip sheets, and lots of other resources on this website that I hope you'll take advantage of. So just to recap, the National Resource Center can help you through its website, searchable library, if you don't see it on one of the pages search the library. There are over 300 resources there that might be helpful to you. We are also developing stakeholder specific products that actually speak to your populations and I think will be very helpful to you and having some of those internal conversations on the importance of healthy marriage education skills.

We are working on a Virtual Learning Center. You will be able to take online courses which will also offer CEU's, and we also offer training and technical assistance which Ted is going to talk more about in a few minutes.

The other thing that I wanted to point out to you in terms of training and technical assistance, is the expertise behind the Resource Center. So you've met some of the team on this call today, but I also want you to know that behind the Center we have skills in research, program design, implementation, organizational development, policy analysis, public-private partnerships, which is something that we heard Connie talk about mention.

We also have topical expertise on healthy marriage, family strengthening, parenting, asset building, family safety, and an array of other important topics that can support you. In addition to the expertise that the team brings to the table we are also supported by a cadre of experts in the field that we feel can call in to help us make sure were meeting your needs.

So with that we are going to have another poll question. And I hope that I have helped you better understand the resources that are available through the National Resource Center, and how they can assist you in integration of relationship education into your agency's service delivery system.

So if you'll take just about 20 seconds and respond to that I will turn you over to Ted to talk more about training and technical assistance. And be sure you are putting in your questions so that we can get to them during the Q&A. Thanks.

All right, a couple more. Okay, Ted, back to you.

**Ted Futris:** Thank you, Robyn. So I want us briefly overview what resources, what training and technical assistance we have available. Like this Webinar, there have been other Webinars. This month alone we did a webinar on integrating healthy marriage and relationship education into the services working with youth, as well as services that promote economic self-sufficiency.

Those Webinars will be - if you missed those Webinars don't worry, they were recorded and will be archived and made available on the National Resource Center Web site. As well, back in June, we did some introduction Webinars providing more in regards to why it's relevant and, for examples of some other state initiatives and efforts.

So if you miss those, please take a moment and visit the Web site. We are currently getting more uploaded so if you don't see something right now to visit back, or contact us and we will let you know when the recording is available.

But we will also be offering out Webinars in the upcoming years on various topics. It might be maybe something hot in the research field that we want to get out there and into your hands. But also Webinars that feature many of our new products and resources that we've been working hard to develop this past year that will be on the Web site.

We'll offer some Webinars to walk you through how to use those tools and resources. And bringing to you what other colleagues are doing in other states to give you some examples and reinforce different ways to integrate marriage and relationship education.

There are also going to be online education opportunities. We are developing our virtual training resource center. And will have modules in the upcoming year that highlight strategies to integrate tools and resources, as well as content that can be taught.

We are also doing regional and state Integration Institute trainings. Where we are bringing together state stakeholders within the state and/or region to brainstorm and process strategies of integrating marriage and relationship education across the various services offered in the state. And in September we are actually visiting North Carolina, Missouri, and Arizona where we are launching our first set of Integration Institute trainings.

So if you're from one of those states let us know. And if you're in a state that may be interested in and Integration Institute training do contact us. The last slide before we close today will have the Resource Center website as well as e-mail and phone number information where you can reach us with an interest in us bringing integration training to you in your state.

We also will be offering individualized technical assistance. So as you're trying to find out what curriculum to use, what strategies to employ, how to engage and develop those partnerships, feel free to contact us using the e-mail or phone number that will be provided at the end of the Webinar and we will follow up with you. And provide individualized technical assistance as needed.

So with that, I'd like to ask Andrea to pose our next two poll questions. And we just want to know, how likely are you to talk with others at your organization about the integration of relationship education to your current services role at work? Let's take about 10 seconds to respond and let us know how likely are you to take this and share it with others.

All right, Andrea, next question. Are you likely to use the National Resource Center for resources or training technical assistance? About five more seconds. Great, thank you all for your responses.

And with that, I'm going to turn it over to Andrea who is going to remind us all about the Q&A. And if you haven't had a chance to pose your question she'll show you how to do that. And we will now take your questions.

**Andrea Strahan:** Thanks, Ted, and thank you, so much, everyone for your presentations today. At this time would like to transition to our question-and-answer period. And please stay tuned for our final survey question afterwards, as well. We've had several great questions submitted and I want pose them to our presenters. But I'd also like to ask everyone to please feel free to continue to submit your questions using the question-and-answer function on your screen.

So our first question is for Connie. And Connie, the question, is what requirements do you have for the volunteers that you use? Do you perform background checks?

**Connie Schlittler:** We do not conduct background checks. Initially, we recruited members of the faith community, and licensed mental health professionals for several years. But we found that other volunteers in the community do a great job with this, where they have the opportunity.

So they have to submit a plan on who they're going to train, what their background and experiences are, when they're going to offer the classes. And so that really helps us. And then the course is several days long that they spend with the trainers and other members of the class. So that's the work that we do on.

**Andrea Strahan:** Okay, great, thank you. And our next question, Debra, it looks like this may be a good one for you to take a shot at first it's, are there any differences in promoting safety and well-being for teens versus children?

**Debra Gilmore:** Thanks, Andrea. The short answer to that is yes. And that's really based on, I hope this is responsive to the meaning of the question, but that's really based on child development. And what comes to mind, just as an example, is that an infant has been for a long period of time without being physically touched or nurtured, that infant literally can die from a lack of nurturing.

And you compare that to the teenager, anyone with our having been a teenager knows that that much hugging, holding, and touching is a very different experience for a teenager and maybe not so much wanted at that stage. So it does look different.

**Andrea Strahan:** Okay, great, thank you. Our next question is for Connie. Connie, you stated that state leadership is essential. Could an individual county implement something like the Oklahoma model if county leadership and partners could line up vision and resources?

**Connie Schlittler:** Absolutely. It could be implemented at any level of government, or any organization. But again, having that leadership involved, make sure that it has continued for this period of time in Oklahoma, and I think the same would be for your county. Whether it's a vision and can be sustained over a long period of time.

**Andrea Strahan:** Okay, wonderful. And then another question we have for you Connie, is can you speak to how you evaluated Family Expectations, and whether you are able to see improvements over time as in more than a year?

**Connie Schlittler:** The results that we have so far are at 15 months after couples participated in the program. And data is being collected on an ongoing basis on several of these. But that's all that we have right now is 15 months from completion. And there are interviews with the couples. And I think there are interviews being conducted with the children of those couples as well.

**Andrea Strahan:** Okay, great, thank you. Robyn, we have a couple questions about the Resource Center now. Someone asked, during your presentation you mentioned asset building and they wanted to know what type of asset building. Is it developmental assets or financial assets?

**Robyn Cenizal:** Well, as it was referenced whenever I was talking, I was specifically referring to asset building in terms of accumulation in management of financial assets, because that is a necessary component in order to move families to self-sufficiency.

But we also do have within the resources related to youth and children information on the 40 developmental assets, which I assume is the other part of that question is referring to. So although I was mentioning asset building from a financial aspect, and assets for independence in different programs, and tools that can support families in that regard, we do also provide information related to youth and assets.

**Andrea Strahan:** Okay, great, thank you. And then another question is asking how the National Resource Center is funded.

**Robyn Cenizal:** The National Resource Center is funded through a grant from the Office of Family Assistance in the Administration for Children and Families.

**Andrea Strahan:** Okay, great, thank you. And then another question for Connie is, can you talk a little bit about how you adapted the Within My Reach curriculum?

**Connie Schlittler:** It was really adapted from a couple's curriculum to a single parent, a single adult, as well as focusing on things that are of interest to folks that are low income. So we focused on the violence prevention. One of the things we did was we conducted focus groups with our TANF recipients so we could get more information about their lives and

their experience. So that helped us really gear up curriculum that was meaningful for the single moms, primarily, who are in the TANF program.

**Andrea Strahan:** Great, thank you. And it looks like our final question, Robyn, if you want to speak to this. Can the Resource Center help me if I want to learn more about healthy marriage programs in my state and area?

**Robyn Cenizal:** Yes. We certainly can. There is information on the Resource Center website about programs around the country, but if you have specific questions about your area, feel free to e-mail us and we can look into that and help you connect with local providers such as the cooperative extension system that provides relationship education programming. And we can also connect to with healthy marriage grantees that might be working in your state and local area.

**Andrea Strahan:** And actually, building off that we just received one more question asking if the Resource Center provides technical assistance in drafting proposals to industries?

**Robyn Cenizal:** Proposals to industries, I'm not really sure if the intent is proposals to industries to gain funding, no that's something we couldn't help with. If it is helping them to identify information that would be helpful in promoting the idea of integrating healthy marriage education skills into a safety net service delivery system as part of an industry, we can help identify all those resources to support that. So I hope that's helpful.

**Andrea Strahan:** Okay, great, thank you. We also had a few questions about the availability of slides and some of the information presented today. And so I want to remind everyone that this presentation, a recording of it, a transcript, and a question-and-answer document covering all these questions we just discussed right now, will be available on our website [healthymarriageandfamilies.org](http://healthymarriageandfamilies.org).

And we are going to have a final survey question here, in just a moment. But then I'm going to post that information so that you will have our contact information and Web site. So stay tune to that after this final survey question.

So I would like to ask everyone to participate in this final poll question. And just as a reminder, all of your responses are anonymous. And this helps us with planning our future webinars. So the final question is, please rate your overall satisfaction with today's webinar. And we will take just a few seconds to give you a moment to answer that. All right, I would like to thank everyone for joining us today. Have a great afternoon.

**Operator:** Thank you, for your participation. That does conclude today's conference.

**END**