Moving Healthy Relationship Education "Up and Out"

Thursday, August 22, 2013; 2pm ET
Webinar Transcript Provided by PGi Global

Operator: Please stand by. Good day and welcome to the Moving Healthy Relationship Education Up and Out Webinar. Today's event is being recorded, and at this time I would like to turn the Webinar over to Rebecca Fairchild. Please go ahead.

Rebecca Fairchild:

Thank you so much and hello everyone. We do have a quick question. If anybody has more than one person sitting in the room with them, if you could just answer the poll question visible on your screen at the moment, we would greatly appreciate that.

I'd like to welcome you to the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families Webinar entitled Moving Healthy Relationship Education Up and Out. My name is Rebecca Fairchild and I'm part of the Resource Center Team. I'd like to thank everyone for joining us today and before we get started with the presentation there are a few housekeeping items I would like to go over.

The audio for today's Webinar will be broadcast through your computer speakers. Please make sure that the volume on your computer speakers is turned up so that you can hear the presentation.

New featured resources that will be discussed in today's Webinar are available for you to download from the pod in the top right corner of your screen designated with the word Files. Please click the name of the file you wish to view, then the Download button to open and save the copy of the resource to your computer.

The resources and videos shown today will be available on our Website, healthymarriageandfamilies.org. To visit our Website, click the link in the middle pod and to your right designated with the words Web Link.

We'll 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 pod designated by the letters Q and A in the right portion of your screen. Type your question into the open field at the bottom and click the Send Question button or hit Enter.

A recording of this presentation, the slides, a transcript and the question and answer document will be posted to the Past Events Archive on our Website, healthymarriageandfamilies.org under the Training, Technical Assistance & Events tab.

Our speakers today will be Debra Gilmore, Operations Manager for the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families, and Ted Futris, Training and Technical Assistance, also at the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families. So, with that, I will go ahead and turn the call over to Debra Gilmore here at the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families. Debra?

Debra Gilmore:

Thank you and in just a moment we're going to be able to announce our guest speakers as well. Let me give you just a little bit of background. I see that there are some new folks and some folks that I hope will always gain something out of the little piece that we tell you about us.

The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families exists to support a broad range of health and human services and safety net service providers with technical assistance, with tools, and with other resources to help you integrate healthy marriage and relationship education in ways that make the most sense for your different and differing service delivery systems.

That can be anything from having tip sheets or family activity sheets that are available either in waiting rooms or during your client visit, to offering a series of group classes to target groups based on one of the many curricula that are other there.

And when we say healthy marriage and relationship education or relationship education, we are talking about building or strengthening interpersonal skills like communication and conflict management. We're also talking about critical skills to that, like parenting and child development and financial literacy, all as an integrated approach to strengthening families.

The base of who we support is purposefully broad as this graphic image on your screen shows there are many different agencies, and I'm sure you are with one of them or affiliated or know one that serves at touch points for the families to learn, build, and strengthen their capacity for safety, self-sufficiency and well-being.

Some of the ones here, Education, Workforce Development, Child Welfare, TANF, Public Health, Tribal, and Military Family Services, these are just a few. Each of you, as part of that safety net for families, should have the same research-based message about the core skills and principles that make up healthy relationships and families.

I believe you've all tuned in today because you're already aware of the impact that healthy marriages and relationships have on children, on families, on work productivity, and community. I'll highlight a few of our resources that will hopefully help to continue building your capacity to move healthy relationship education up and out after we hear from our wonderful guest speakers about their experiences and their recommendations. Ted?

Ted Futris:

Welcome everybody this afternoon to our Webinar. So glad you could join us. And today we have some speakers joining us to really help us understand, you know, once we know this is something we're passionate and want to do, how do we get that buy-in internally within our organizations or agencies but also how do we engage community partners and get their buy-in and involvement to move this effort forward?

To help us help our panel of speakers understand kind of where folks are coming from, we have a poll question we'd like to put up, please, and ask you to choose a response that best fits you. Does your agency currently promote healthy relationship education to the clients that you serve?

Do you do so with the informational handouts? Do you partner with community organizations? Do your staff or volunteers hold workshops? Do you do more than one of these things or are you not there yet and it's something you're still working on? So please go ahead and choose your response.

All right, based on responses so far, we have roughly about half of our audience here engages in more than one of the ways, one or more of the strategies in promoting healthy relationships. So, keeping that in mind, you know, today's focus, our goal is really to promote what we refer to as a Level Two level of integration, engaging partners.

We like to think of engagement and integration of relationship marriage education in three ways and these aren't hierarchical in any way because as the responses on the poll clearly show, many of you engage in multiple ways. But basic engagement, as Debra alluded to, might simply involve distributing handouts in waiting rooms to your clients, reading materials.

Level Two really involves connecting with others in your community who might be offering classes and services that strengthen relationships and referring clients to them or inviting them in to your agency to offer those programs. Level Three is about full integration, which is training your staff, training your volunteers, to go out and be able to teach the skills that promote healthy relationships.

Now all three levels really do involve a level of partnership, getting buy-in within your agency to support this, to see the value in it, and to identify ways to get this going and get these resources into the hands of your clients. So our speakers today are going to illustrate how they have actually engaged internally their partners, their coworkers, their colleagues, but also externally, community partners, to fulfill these various levels of integration.

We are also happy to have with us four speakers who share a little bit about this. Dr. Jay Mancini will be speaking shortly. He's the Director of the Family and Community Resilience Laboratory here at the University of Georgia. And he'll kind of present a nice little framework of what capacity building involves, the critical role of relationships and partnerships.

Colleen Ellingson from Wisconsin, Elizabeth Tattershall from Missouri, and Jane Riffe from West Virginia will each illustrate for us examples of how they have gotten buy-in internally and externally from their partners.

And before I turn it over to Dr. Mancini, I'd like to ask another poll question. Which of the following have you found most challenging when implementing new initiatives, whether it be relationship education or any new initiative, new effort within your agency? Is it establishing leadership support, defining goals and objectives, maintaining effective communication, engaging staff and partners? Which one of these would you select?

That's great. So looking at the polls, the responses clearly around a little over half of the audience here indicated engaging staff and partners is one of the most challenging aspects of implementing new initiatives, and which is a wonderful transition to our first speaker to really help us understand strategies that research has shown to be effective in engaging those partners.

I'd like to introduce Dr. Jay Mancini. He's the Haltiwanger Distinguished Professor and Department Head at the University of Georgia in the Department of Human Development and Family Science. Jay, welcome and thank you for joining us here today.

Jay Mancini

Thanks very much, Ted, and it's a pleasure to be part of this Webinar today. I noticed that I have 14 minutes. Most university people don't get much said in 14 minute, but I will do my best.

In the last 1990s, myself and some colleagues received a grant from the United States Air Force to help them build community capacity. And the reason we were asked to work with them is that they had a lot of agencies and organizations that were operating pretty much in a silo fashion and there was very little collaboration.

And they felt that it was a most inefficient system and they wanted a little support on how, in fact, to take a different approach to human and social service delivery.

So, the team that began that work was myself and then Gary Bowen, Gary is currently at UNC Chapel Hill, Jim Martin, currently at Bryn Mawr College, Dennis Orthner, recently retired from UNC Chapel Hill, and then later in our work Angela Huebner, currently on the faculty at Virginia Tech, joined our team as well.

Let me briefly talk about sort of where we've been since around 1998 with the Community Capacity Building Initiative. It's been applied in a variety of ways. For example, we had a project funded by the Oak Ridge National Laboratory and we looked at the CCB framework with regard to natural disasters and vulnerable populations.

And we helped to build framework on how do you mobilize communities to support vulnerable individuals and families during those kind of crisis situations. Most recently, the framework has been applied to elder abuse issues in communities and a recent paper appeared along with some Virginia Tech colleagues that talked about how do you, in fact, mobilize communities to deal with severe community issues such as elder abuse?

We've also done some work that's more intervention oriented in a project with homeless veterans. And we, in fact, studied how a community is built among homeless individuals who are impoverished and where a number of them have been living on the street for a number of years. So, the point I want to make is that the general things I'm talking about have broad application and hopefully they can apply to the area of interest in today's Webinar.

A lot of what I'm going to say is informed by a current project we're doing for DoD's Military Community and Family Policy. We are building for them an underlying curriculum on building community capacity. And that should be available, we hope, in the spring of 2014, and it will be available to not only military communities but to civilian service providers as well.

So, if you see the diagram here, which is one of the various ways we've tried to draw a picture of our community capacity building framework. A lot of the work we do is centered on informal networks and on formal systems. But in particular a lot of work is

focused on how can formal systems, agencies, organizations, etc. support informal networks, the relationships we have with friends, neighbors, and work associates.

Let me briefly kind of summarize the nature of informal networks. What do they do for individuals? In the literature is about four or five general ways that people talk about the significance of informal networks and mention this because we often are unclear on why would a formal system, in fact, be mainly focused on building informal networks.

Well, informal networks works help people deal with despair and worry. They help individuals to accomplish practical tasks. Informal networks help the rest of us to achieve better decisions. Informal networks have a clear companionship focus, a place where we get support.

Informal systems validate us. They help our feelings of - hopefully our feelings of feeling worthwhile, competent and hopeful. Informal networks can include extended families, friends, neighbors and others. Formal systems in contrast we really associate with agencies and organizations.

That is those groups that are formalized, people are often paid, and have the mission of providing support programs and services. In the work that we've done over the years, we have intentionally focused that the primary role of an agency or organization is to build informal networks because it's within informal networks that people live.

Just a few more comments on the graph, and I'm sorry, I just confused Evin who's helping me out here. If you see the box that's called community capacity we define that in a very simple way, a sense of shared responsibility, and collective competence.

So we have sort of sentiment aspect of I'm not just responsible for my own welfare and success but I'm responsible for others. But having a sentiment and a share of sentiment is insufficient and so when we study community capacity we also look at collective competence.

How do people come together to accomplish important results? And you see that final box on the bottom and the results can be for individuals, they can be for families, they can be for couple relationships and so on.

So in the course of our work we've often talked about the notion of collaboration, and for those of you who have read this literature and I expect a lot of you have, we often times get caught up in to definitions. What is a coalition, what's collaboration, what's a partnership?

I tend to not get too concerned with that, a friend of mine, (Pauline ((inaudible))) said, "Jay, I'm not so interested in counting how many angels can sit on the head of a needle," and so I will present that same caution to you.

But let me talk briefly about what I think are some essential elements of whether you want to call a collaboration or a partnership. And I want to give credit to my colleague from Virginia Tech, Lydia Marek, Lydia has really done the heavy lifting in our, in the work I've done over the years on collaboration and she was with the Family and Community Research Laboratory at Virginia Tech.

So for more detailed information - she doesn't know this, but I'm offering her to you if you're interested. So the thing about collaboration is this, that we know it's exceedingly difficult but we know that it's often the key to solve big problems in communities, in families, in relationships and what have you.

And we maintain that at a community level, big problems require big solutions. Oftentimes we throw sort of Band-Aid approaches to dealing with large community issues, whether a community issue is safety in the streets, whether it's healthy families or healthy relationships.

So of all the work we do, we spend time working with groups on how in fact to build connections and kind of avoid the silo approach that often gets agencies and organizations into trouble. I think the most essential part of a collaboration is this - and it's somewhere on one of these slides, I don't recall where.

And it is developing a shared vision and shared goals. Often time when people come together around the table to deal with an important issue, they bring the family their individual goals, or their individual agency goals, and are hesitant to actually put those aside for the moment and develop a shared vision and a shared set of goals with partners around the table.

So we feel, at the end of the day, that this is the essential element of bringing together professionals in the community with citizens in the community around to the issues. In a handful of minutes I will conclude but it seems simplistic but I'll live with that.

And I will conclude it's all about networks and networks are all about connections and connections are all about relationships. I'll repeat that in a handful of minutes. So, if you look at that first slide let me just point out that collaboration rests on the foundation of connections.

There's a very simple reason for this and in our capacity building framework we talk about the role that trust plays, and we know well that in fact in the absences of connections between professionals or between professionals and people, others in communities, that collaboration is difficult in the absence of trust.

And trust does not occur unless we are in contiguity with others and actually intentional about the time we spend and kind of the object our interactions with them. Next slide. Now if you look at this slide, as I look at it, I reminded that a lot of our work, the work that Lydia and I did was within the context of how do you sustain community based program for families.

And so you will see the word sustainability appear in these handful of slides. And that's why, that was the context. We had a fifteen year project funded by U.S. Department of Agriculture on Sustained and Community based programs. And what we discovered in the research part of what we did is that often times there was a lack of clarity on goals.

Moreover often times the planning was frankly unrealistic. We used to talk with groups about, you know, please stay away from goals that involve world peace. It does not work. We'd often time talks to groups about what is it you have some say about, what exactly can you as an individual professional, you in a collaboration or you working with individuals in the community, what do you really have some say about?

And that ought to be a primary guidance on the goals that a collaborative group or a set of partners develops. If you look at that same slide, some of this is so obvious, I'm thinking why is it on the slide? Well if it's so obvious, why often do in fact we fail, for example, to utilize member skills and strengths? Why do we fail sometimes to actually facilitate team building?

Some of the work we've done actually came out of a workshop we did in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. And this project was sponsored by America's Promise and we worked with United Way of New Orleans. And we worked with not just groups in New Orleans, but groups from Houston, Texas.

The reason was, as New Orleans cleared out in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, a lot of families went to Houston. And so we worked not only with United Way New Orleans but groups in Houston as well. And a lot of our work was saying, "Okay, you're both dealing with various aspects of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. How can you develop partnerships and collaborations that accesses resources and minimizes deficits that each group may have?"

I'm happy to say that we were part of the work of a lot of people in helping New Orleans begin to get back on its feet in terms of what it was doing for families. There were two questions that we always asked in the work that we do.

And it's very simple, when we work with organizations and groups, we sort of have conversations on, sort of them taking the pulse of their community or the situations that they deal with as professionals and community leaders.

And then we say, "All right, here's the first questions, now that you've sort of talked about situations in your community or in the arena in which you work," I'll give marriage as an example, "Are you satisfied with what you see, are you satisfied with the status quo?" Now, if people say to us, "Actually we like what we see," well we pack up and go home - we're done.

We've never had that happen. The related question we ask then is, "Okay, if you're not satisfied with the status quo or what you see in relation to the world in which you work, what do you want to see different at the end of the day?"

And as groups answered that question, what they want to see at the end of the day, it begins to set the concept, the context which then begins to give direction on what they have to do with regard to a collaboration.

As you can see on top of that slide clearly define the problem that a collaboration wishes. Now if we come from different organizations, we really see a different part of the elephant. That's just natural. And so some of us focus on the nose, some on the ears, some I was going to say some on the hoofs but I don't think elephants have hoofs but at any rate.

In our work, you know, we stress because it's a resilience approach that it's insufficient to look at needs that individuals, couples, and families may have. That we must equally look at the assets that individuals, couples, families, and communities have.

That is one mark of a resilience approach to affecting change. We often times too much focus on psychopathology, in looking at individuals in families or relationships and overlook the assets that those same individuals may have.

Now the whole business of what we want to see at the end of the day involves a pathway. And so in this slide you can see we have, you know, we draw attention to short-term and long-term goals.

This is important for a variety of reasons. One is that usually a short-term goal is on the path to reaching a long-term goal. The other is a very pragmatic function in our view.

You know, people talk about the phrase, you know, grab the low-hanging fruit. Well what a short-term goal often does is gives us a chance to first identify what is the low-hanging fruit in our community or in the arenas in which we work.

And, you know, accomplishing short-term goals often gives partnerships or collaborations sort of the juice they need to continue working together.

Also in this slide it says all member should agree. I really should probably should have added, there ought to be reasonable agreement. I think asking for absolute agreement is more a, you know, wish than reality.

The other piece I would mention is that always returning to what are the desired results is pivotal for all of this. A key issue is often buy-in. How do we get people around the table to come back a second time?

Or how do we get people to stay involved with the issues. We also think that a primary issue in this in terms of buy-in is to get people to differentiate their own goals, or the goals of their agency if that's the case from our goals. That is the goals we have as a set of partners or collaborators.

The other piece we really stress and this is something that really deserves attention, more attention on another day is it's more productive as we approach issues of individuals, couples, families, and communities to don't get caught up first of all in methods of achieving goals because it's more productive to manage and think about results than it is to manage activities.

The other day I was in a meeting and someone used the phrase there's more than one way to skin a cat. I don't really like the visual that that presents but quite honestly it's true. Often times there are multiple methods to achieve the results that we may have for families. And so to be more clear about at the end of the day what do we want is far more productive than being caught up in the particular activities to get there.

Another piece that we've often dealt with groups is communication. And, you known, we are in a partnership now. Its' a fairly complex one. The University of Georgia, the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, the United States Department of Agriculture, a private technology company, and the Department of Defense, are all partners in a major project.

And so communication is a real key to this. Now we know everything there is to know about communication but oddly enough we sometimes drop the ball. And then misunderstandings develop.

And so if you see on this, you do see on this slide something about the frequency of communication, something about, you know, meetings are important. Different work groups are important. Establishing communication channels are important with any partner in this.

It's something that once you get involved in the work, it's easy to kind of forget the process and the mechanism to keep the work rolling smoothly.

I also want to foot note, if you look at the bottom of that slide, communication of local community leaders in the broader community, in most cases it actually makes sense that local leaders and the broader community are in fact the partners rather than separate from the partners and from the collaboration.

The next slide talks about staff and partner involvement. Remind you that the context of our 15-year project, we're community based programs and the focus is often on how do you sustain benefits for families? It was not on, how do you sustain activities? Again think about what I said a moment ago. But it's how do you sustain benefits for families?

Some of the projects we looked at they were childcare programs. Some were reading programs for older children. Some were family education, you know, parent education programs. Some were focused on teaching math skills. Some were focused on developing language skills for immigrants.

So there was a wide variety of programs that we looked at. If you look at the third bullet point, staff are qualified to work on a project. Now since I don't know exactly who's part of the webinar today I don't know if you have a staff or you are the staff.

But often times in larger organizations we are amazed by people who are often put in positions to work with kids or work with families. And we found early in our research that many times especially in the childcare the early care arena that people were often not qualified to work in these very important projects and training was in fact lacking.

So the issue of internal collaboration inside the organization can really suffer when in fact there's too much difference in sort of the training level of individuals.

The last bullet point, it might be the most important, partnerships must be active. Years ago when I lived in Virginia, I was part of, it was called a collaboration it probably wasn't. What it was is that once a month ten people came around a table. That's what we did.

And I realized that the notion of the partnership did not reach much beyond assembling once a month around a table. That's a very passive partnership. A very passive, you know, collaborative approach. If these things are going to work then they must be active. They must have the goals that I talked about and must be results oriented.

The other thing I want to mention is that part of being an active organization or partnership is that it must be behaviorally oriented, not just sort of sentimentally oriented. Good will and good work are the ideal of companions.

Well I appreciate you giving me this little time to kind of muse about these matters and I will give you my conclusion again. It's all about networks. Networks are all about connections. And connections are all about relationships. It's my pleasure to turn over the program to Colleen Ellingson.

Colleen Ellingson:

Hi everyone. I'm the Executive Director, CEO for the Coalition for Children Youth and Families in Wisconsin. Our agency has been serving foster and adoptive families for over 29 years now.

We're a statewide organization and we assist families with information, training, support, recruitment on behalf of waiting children and a lot of technical assistance for ((inaudible)) around foster care systems.

So we were very lucky that we were one of the wonderful agencies that got the incredible Healthy Marriage grants around adoption. And so we had from '05 through '09 the ability to develop a research-based curriculum that was very specifically focused for foster care and adoptive families.

So the modules contained post-placement realities, relationship warning signs, development stages as it relates to foster and adoptive children, child traumatic stress and all the relationship communication tools that families need to work together well.

So it was a lot of looking at not only how could parent-to-parent talk to each other and communicate, but how could parents communicate with their children. We came into wanting to do something like this because we had been around a long time and we knew that great families became foster families and adoptive families, but the reality was that, you know, five and ten years later we were hearing back from them with their extreme struggles.

And so, it's really was our drive to help create something that was new that was very, very focused for them. So, you know, one of the things that happened is you create something very wonderful through a federal grant and then, then you have to turn it into reality.

And so that's what we've been doing in the last few years is really testing what is the best delivery systems and how does all that work so that we can see that, how it's going to work in the real world and going forward with other agencies. One of the things that is absolutely critical are supporters to make things like this happen.

And we have had some unique supporters, partners and collaborators as we've been doing this because we knew that this, when we had the testing of this federal grant and what the program did, there was significant - five years of very intense research on these people.

And some of the children within each family so that we knew that we had something that was very, very effective but we said, "You know, it's not something that you want to just keep bottled up, you really want to share it with other states and organizations."

And I think one of the things that was unique for me and for our organization is that knowing that a corporation was going to step forward and be one of those supporters to

help us do these next steps. So we had had a relationship with Jockey International, yes the underwear people.

For many years their CEO was an adopted person, and she looked at post adoption as being a critical need in states. And she said, "We really want to invest in this." So when we were at the end of the federal grant, we said, we really need some help doing the next stages and one of those stages was being able to reach out to other agencies throughout the country and get them to become partners with us to start training this in other places.

And so the corporation really has funded us doing facilitator training over the last three years. So that has really, really been exciting because it's given us the opportunity really to start to see implementation in other places. For example, Family Services of Washington has been working with us and starting to train the curriculum and talk to other people about it.

So, that's really, really exciting. When Jay talked about collaboration, I think that's where Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan has been that collaboration partner. We went very deliberately to an organization like Lutheran Social Services in our state because of some key reasons.

They're a very, very strong agency, it is the largest private agency in our state that with services in locations throughout the state. And we looked at them, we'd already had a good relationship, you know the friendly relationship with one of the agencies that we, you know, talked to and worked with all the time.

And we said, can we get into a deeper dive relationship with you? Can we really work as a collaboration and so, over the last year, I think what Jay talked about in terms of sharing vision and sharing goals has been really what we have been working on together.

We knew that this is an intense curriculum, one of the things we said is, you know, where do we want to go with this, how do we want to bring it extensively into our state with families? What does that mean financially for our agencies? What is the cost structure that we're going to have connected to it?

What is the methodology of doing this training when it's an eighteen module training, and you know, do we take pieces, do we combine, do we do all those kinds of things? One of the interesting things is that when we look at a dialogue like that we really start talking a lot about it, we did some little trial kinds of things.

It's really looking at what are the goals that we want to set for us in performance and the agencies working together. And it was very unique because Lutheran Social Services said, you know, we have adoption staff throughout the entire state.

We're going to put a performance goal in that they are going to recruit X number of families every year to be involved in taking this training. So it's really a super, super goal for them. We also have discussed extensively how we are co-branding this effort and so we've been working a lot on that.

When we started this project and continuing on, the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families have been incredible. We've worked well with them for 29 years, have

contracts with them. What they do for us is that they share finalized adoption data we, that has been stored with us, because we are, we provide a lot of post adoption support to families.

So they really are - have been incredible about giving us the tools that we really can reach out in one way. We know that sometimes right after an adoption takes place, families don't seem to need this. But we can reach out to them over the years then and say, "You know, this is really something good for you and your family."

The families themselves have been are most critical supporters. Parents who've already gone through the training have volunteered to recruit other families. They are families who've been willing to share their stories about the key things that we're trying to train through video.

And that is so powerful when you have real families who are telling their real stories. I think it, it has added just a huge depth to what we've been doing. We have families that after they've had the training, have, are co-facilitators.

We feel it's incredibly important that when you do relationship training, when you do communication training, you really have to have people who are living in the trenches and doing it every day and who'll understand the concepts and can be champions.

So I was asked to talk about gaining buy-ins. One of the things is, is that when we look at staff, for us, our staff has been involved in the development of the curriculum from the beginning. So when you build a curriculum from within you really have staff buy-in from the start.

They've been involved in development, they've been involved in the testing, they've been involved in the service delivery of it. But what's really been important has been that they've also heard first-hand from the families about the impact that it has made on their lives. So when they see positive impact it really makes them realize the benefit of the curriculum.

It also helps them become very good marketers and sales people of a curriculum. Because when we're trying to say, "Hey this is really an investment you're making as a family. Here's why this is something you're going to want to do when you are really busy all the time as parents."

We've had them involved in looking at next stages around the program, and now what they're working is, this fall they're going to be doing a major survey to all families to kind of get feedback about what families would like, how long would they like it and looking at some of those kinds of things.

So when we gain buy-in and we're looking out to other agencies, reaching out to other agencies across other states, we really share information about why this is really important. It, when I look at, you know, healthy marriage and relationship education, it's often an uphill battle.

Because for many agencies, many times they're saying, we just look at short-term things. We look at what are the short term results, what are we absolutely have to provide for this family, what do we have to do for this family to get a child back out of

foster care into their first family? How do we keep this kid in this foster family so that I don't have to find a new family for this child?

What can I just plug in there? They seldom look at what are some of the long term things? What can we provide for families that make us most effective and make them most effective? Because we're a statewide organization we really have a pretty broad look at what's happening around foster care and adoptive families.

And what we are seeing is that for foster families they often burn out after fairly short time. Maybe after one child because they're really struggling with their relationship and they don't know how to deal with these difficulties of raising kids who've been exposed to trauma and abuse over time.

So you know some of the families who look like star families that agencies initially use them in recruitment and as spokespeople, you know, five years down the line, two years down the line, they're sometimes calling us and saying we are really in trouble, our marriage is in trouble because we just don't feel like we are communicating well with each other.

So we are really trying to have dialogues with agencies to talk about the long term goals. You know, what does it take to make the, meet the needs of foster and adoptive families. We look at retention issues for our state and for all states as a huge issue for foster families. When we lose quality foster families there is a huge cost in terms of recruiting and licensing and training new people.

When we look at how do we try to meet family needs one of the things that our organization has really done in terms of having a holistic approach to family needs is really looking, what can we do around information that they need, what can we do around education, what is the training they need, what is the support, the warm line kinds of things, the referrals, what are the networking opportunities for people?

One of the things we did when we did a, some of the research was really that we developed a family stress and support measure that looked at a number of variables that, because we really wanted to see what were we seeing that was changing in terms of betterment for a family and what were some of the things that we really saw as long term gains that a family was going to have?

We were seeing a incredible reduction in the number of fights at home and those were both fights between parents and parents and parents and their children. We were seeing less fights at school. Parents were being called 50% less times to school because their children were in trouble.

There was a reduction in children who ended up going back into foster care or higher levels of care because they could not be controlled within their homes and helped within their homes. So there was a stability increase in that family that was lasting in comparison to prior.

They also, there were huge gains for the family, for the parents, it was amazing what happened is that they felt more confident about that they could handle things and they felt less isolated.

They made huge numbers of connection that now five and seven and I think nine years later now, are still going on between parents and parents so that information sharing that happens between them becomes a support system that we are not controlling, they are and they are making that last. So I think that at this point I'm going to be turning it over to Elizabeth Tattershall. Thank you.

Elizabeth Tattershall:

Thank you, Colleen. This is Elizabeth Tattershall. I'm a Program Development Specialist for the Department of Social Services, Children's Division in the state of Missouri. I'm responsible for reviewing, writing and revising policy for the recruitment, development and retention of resource homes.

We use that term of resource homes to be all inclusive as foster, relative, respite, emergency and adoptive resources. And the Children's Division is a licensing agency that does the approving of foster and adoptive homes in the state of Missouri. I come today with a lot of support in Missouri for the healthy relationship training and resources that are provided.

We had state legislation, that was in 2011 that established a task force and the task force was set to look at enhancing our current recruitment and retention practices here in the state of Missouri. And they identified different strategies to use including expanding supports, enhancements of our training and professional development, recruitment approaches and improvement just on our licensing process.

And several work groups were formed out of this task force and I was, I am the leader of one of them, that's the training work group. And through this work group we researched training needs and training resources. Not only for our pre-service before resources are approved but even after the in services in the state of Missouri to be renewed you have to take in-service training as a foster or adoptive parent.

So we looked at those different resources and to come to the task to make our recommendations. Well during the middle of this I attended the National Resource Center Integrated Institute in September of 2012 and was introduced to the program, the curriculum and the resources that the resource center offers.

And I took that information back to my work group and started talking to them about all this resources that we had that we could use in our recommendations for enhancing our training. And right from the beginning got support from that work group because all the research we had been doing this was definitely at the top of our list.

Through this whole process my direct supervisor and administration from our state director and deputy directors have been very supportive of the recommendations of using the healthy marriage and relationship education into our training programs. The next level actually for us and the state of Missouri is to get this put into our policy and to implement it.

That is where I'm at right now with it, we've actually (undistinguishable) the workgroups that I'm on, we presented at a, to the task force that we feel like we want to recommend that foster parents take during their first two years of being approved as a resource home, take courses that are offered through the resource center.

And basically just waiting for those approvals to get to their final fruition so that we can start implementing them. We have a state foster care and adoption board that's in Missouri that I'm a liaison to from the state standpoint and I've shared this with that group as well and they're excited about this as well.

Other agencies involved through that task force there was both in the private sector and from the public sector, members on this board which gave me contacts within different agencies across the state. I know when I was coming up with the words, I can't believe how open the agencies were to this information.

Obviously seen as a need to help our foster homes and, of course, that's what I deal with is our resource homes so saw this - then we see it for our employees as well but for our foster homes we saw this as a way not only to - the development of foster homes by help giving them the skills they need but also through retention.

And I know Colleen had even mentioned that, you know, the stress levels that are involved with foster homes and the children come in with their trauma events and with the families that they're associated with and the stronger that that family that this child is being put into is the more benefit it's going to be to that child, to that child's family and to that foster family.

The way on the gaining the buy in, honestly I didn't - I didn't have any barriers to this as long as I presented it in a way that it was education about relationships period. I think when we first came into it was, especially with the institutes, it was healthy marriage and relationships and people heard the word marriage and first I'll say, you know, we're not all of our resource homes are married individuals, not all of them are in relationships.

So I began presenting it - the information about healthy relationships differently showing that it was - definitely through relationship skills, it affects all types of relationships. It doesn't matter if it's a romantic relationship, professional, personal, social.

Relationships are just important to a foundation and it makes for healthy families but also healthy children, healthy case workers, anybody we're involved with. We have relationships with everyone so just help, you know, presenting there as being that all-encompassing.

I've also shared as much information as possible with those on the task force - the resources from the Institute. Those are so helpful. In fact in our policy presentation and drafts that we've submitted to the Director, we're giving links to the resources and actually naming those resources so that they can be integrated into our foster home licensing policy.

One thing, again, the only opposition that I felt like I encountered was when you first presented it as a marriage relationship and once people get the bigger picture it's - I've not had any kind of obstacles with it at all and it's been quite a journey and it's still continuing but we're getting closer to its fruition of being in our policy. At this time I'm turning it over to Jane Riffe.

Jane Riffe:

Hello, nice to be with you all today. I'm an Extension Specialist in West Virginia University and my specialty area is family and human development. And today I've been asked to talk about our experience of, you know, almost seven years of partnering with agencies to help them integrate happy marriage and relationship education into their services, and to also talk about specifically extension as a community partner and the resources that we have available.

So cooperative extension is a real interesting thing, it's a network we're in. We're in every state and we are the outreach branch of the university in that state, the land grant universities. So as such our services are almost always free or certainly low cost and there are no income limitations for services that we provide, so what we do is provide education services and also help with evaluating programs and accessing resources.

For a while I did a stump speech about every national conference I'd go to about accessing these resources and basically - so my licenses - I do have professional licenses which I still hold as a clinical social worker and a counselor.

I come from 20 some years in private practice and in that time or sense the time I came on the extension side, one of my stump speeches was that whatever topic you're researching on behalf of your client or the families that you serve or in service for your staff, to just put that topic in and then add the word extension to your Google and you will be rewarded with many resources.

So through the extension service we work with - I serve the State and we also agents, our county educators have been agents and they in this state are often living in those communities and working there.

So we provide online resources as well as do other extension services and other family specialists across the system. So today I'm going to talk a little bit about the partnership that we had beginning in 2005 and it went to 2012 with a couple of different funding streams.

We partnered with the Department of Health and Human Resources. That's where the funding came from and in that process we founded coalitions to deliver healthy marriage and relationships so this was indeed part of the same kind of focus that many of you on the call I'm sure are still involved in, using a coalition-based model putting agencies together.

So in this one of our focal points was really to try to focus on families who were already getting services from the DHHR so these were TANF families and Head Start or high risk individuals.

So what we did is we promoted research-based, skill-focused education in the way of classes and workshops. We did this with three points. We worked on relationships not just the big M word, marry. We found certainly that it was better to talk about couple relationships. We also delivered information on parent education and financial ed seeing that that was all part of the same effort.

And what we - one of the things we did was we had conferences twice a year to train our coalitions. The coalitions were - in the beginning the thought was that they were going to

be volunteers. As time went on it really seemed that these were individuals who were from social agencies that were already serving families in the safety net as the Resource Center calls it now, but really were interested - I'm not going to say that.

We've been doing research and I'm going to talk a little - just, you know, 30 seconds about this. It will be published in the Journal of Extension and in our coalitions their research focuses on how extension educators can help coalitions, which might be all of you, at different stages in their development learning that our groups, no surprise, have different needs at different stages.

And what we did is we provided technical assistance by assessing needs and we helped counties with on-site visits to identify key partners who should be at the table and provided a lot of support for the actual programs in terms of helping them pick curriculum or getting them materials with our funding, and then supporting educators through phone calls and face to face and conferences, and also a Facebook site - page.

We kind of were a clearing house for testing out educational materials in this content area. Some of our particular partnerships that worked well were - let me go to the work force readiness one there that the SPOKES has a really long name and it stands for Strategic Planning and Occupational Knowledge for Employment and Success.

So it's the TANF force program. This is a mandated audience and with this we have had great success. They're very open. Often the SPOKES coordinator or who this would be in your state, were very open to program materials and so we did a lot of different things on aspects of relationships and how to improve communication, how to talk to your partner, love languages. We've done a lot of different pieces to that audience.

Head Start and the parent groups and working with parent coordinators. Sometimes it was handouts but more often it was really face to face in their parent meetings and that was a wonderful audience for a lot of materials that we had developed.

Safe Space partners was one of our most successful and kind of interesting models is we used the term five great dates and it's a simple dates launch program which goes for 20 minutes and then you send a couple out on a date and the point is that you need a babysitter.

So being extension for teenagers we were able to tap them for babysitting and we delivered this program through churches and congregational groups that approached us about being interested in doing that.

The Family Court and all of this was pretty new venues for extension within this state and really moving squarely into the area of relationships and families. So with Family Court I developed a new curriculum to standardize the co-parenting curriculum for divorcing parents and some agents teach that. And that realm of extension has been more in the consultation and evaluative of partners for community agencies.

Strategies for Success. Well, you know, I really liked what Jay said and really echo his - just a lot of what he said about how do you get from, I think he said, our goals to - or my goal to our goal, however, he said that.

We did focus group research with our coalitions and one of the people in a coalition that had been around for a while talked about it in the beginning it was like piggies feeding at

the trough. Some sort of words like that with really the idea that people had their goals and they were there to get what they wanted for their own agency and their own clientele.

And it really was quite a process that we discovered through the focus group research of people coming together and moving from just communicating to getting more coordinating and then really trusting and moving into more collaboration. Feed them seemed to be very, very useful for community audiences and people are comfortable with a meal. Babysitting is also important.

And so I guess these strategies for success, I'm focused on the partnering so that when I say provide a meal, I mean, we think about that for constituents or our clients or how you do that, but we had sort of, you know, lunch meetings for the coalitions and they had a simple meal and then a 20-minute thing about how you use this curriculum or what you can do specifically to help teen girls with body images.

Just different pieces and so the coalition partners they became - as they became experts that engaged them more because they had something to share and immediately that practical kind of thing that other agencies would take just really worked very well.

Of course the piggybacking - piggy, piggy, piggy back on the piggy bank, of the wonderful connections that are already there in communities, and family resource networks or coalitions, whatever exists. We found that that's how it started but as it progressed then it became more a focus on this particular project.

So people that are used to working together can more easily integrate the marriage and relationship stuff just because they're used to each other and they know who does what and what to count on so it's nice when you have that. Although we found the faith-based were new partners and they were often doing things independently. The energy of this once people began to share back and forth has become truly wonderful.

I also want to talk about cooperative extension. So we are a nationwide network of wonderful, wonderful materials and resources and as I mentioned before, you know, my strategy used to be to just even work in extension to find what my partners are doing in other states. There's not always a good way to do that but Google helped with that as well as searching those extension sites.

But we have a wonderful thing that I want to tell you about called NERMEN and Dr. Futris has been very involved with this. You will find resources there put there by extension networks and now the third thing and most wonderful is that the National Resource Center makes this very easy with their library.

Most extensions and specialists, and particularly specialists, are program evaluation experts so this is a good place to turn to find out are you really making progress, is this doing anything. And it's a really wonderful match for extension to have those partners because that is in fact our mission to make sure the expertise of the university gets out into the community and affects people in a positive way.

Extension can be - sometimes can offer funding or materials or expertise in applying for that funding. So I strongly encourage you to look to your state extension specialist, and perhaps the county and see what resources are available in your area.

Not every state supports this kind of work through the extension service but you will with some, not too much, looking you can find that through the National Resource Center and the NERMEN Network. And I'm going to now, so it's Nerman.org, I'm now turning it back to Ted.

Ted Futris:

Thank you, Jane, I appreciate it.

Jane Riffe:

You're welcome.

Ted Futris:

Thank you everyone for the wonderful advice and the stories and the examples that you illustrated and what I'd like to do is, you know, just remind everybody that at the end there'll be an opportunity for questions and answers so as you think of questions, as Andrea pointed out, please put those questions in the - up in there and post those and we'll have an opportunity for our panelists to respond to those questions.

But before we transition on I just - final advice after each of the panelists have heard everything that everyone has shared, is there a final piece of advice you'd like to share with our audience here before we transition on and we'll start with Jay.

Jay Mancini:

Hey, thank you. Well this has been really informative to me. I really appreciate my colleagues talking about the work that they're doing in communities.

So my advice is this. That we ought to be intent about minimizing vulnerabilities in families, we ought to be intentional about maximizing their resilience and their assets and that really is what a lot of folks on this call are about.

And so to me the vehicle is mobilizing informal networks in conjunction with the expertise of professionals who care about families. I think, Ted, that's the key.

Ted Futris:

Thank you, Jay. Colleen.

Colleen Ellingson:

I'm going to say that I think, you know, people who are going into this need to really figure out how they can do the extensive outreach to families to get them to commit to time intensive education programs. Families know they need something like this. They're excited about it but, you know, they're looking at their lifestyle and saying, well how do I balance this.

So really it's getting agencies and their partners who are trying to integrate healthy marriage and relationship communication education and to look at how do we deliver curriculums and support to families in the way that they need them and when they need them. So creating good partnerships is really critical for that and I think that that's where every agency can work together and you really can have those great collaborations. Back to you.

Ted Futris:

Thank you. And Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Tattershall:

Well, I guess I'd have to say it's how the program is communicated. That will make or break any kind of results that are going to be seen from it. I know with Missouri's Children Division's plan to implement this into our state resource home licensing policy and our training practice, you know, we're anticipating not only enriching the community at large but also supporting an increased retention of our resource homes. So communication. How it's communicating.

Ted Futris:

Great, thank you. And Jane.

Jane Riffe:

I would say, remember the multiplier effect that it can be achieved from partnering and that agencies working together can definitely accomplish more. Every agency has its limitations and working together with partners can help fill in some of those gaps. And to be aware of the stage of the effort whatever it is in your community that it takes a while, as Jay said, to build trust but the multiplier effect is a wonderful thing to keep in mind.

Ted Futris:

Wonderful. Thank you all again, I appreciate it and hang in there. We're going to take some questions here at the end but before we do that I want to turn it over to Debra to share with us a little bit more about the National Resource Center.

Debra Gilmore:

Thanks, Ted. I promised you all that I would highlight a few of the resources that we do have available for you. I don't want to take too much time so we have question and answer time but did want to fulfill that promise.

In the upper right of your screen you'll see a sample of four of the five resources that are materials you can download including two from our Win-Win Partnership series that highlights facts related to the connectivity between healthy marriage and relationship education

And specific support of services, and a promising practices summary that came out of a forum we held, and another sheet that talks about - that really complements (Jane's) information about working with cooperative extension.

And then below that you will see a link to our partnership and tools page from our Website that has more tools like a sample Memorandum of Understanding, if a formal partnership is something that makes sense for you and your community.

I know that that's not how all communities work but if it does we have samples for templates, we have readiness assessments there for collaboration and all kinds of other things that we encourage you to take a look at.

We also have, we're not going to play it today given the time but I want to mention that we have a video that not only gives an overview of our Resource Center but also another video that highlights within about, I believe it's less than three minutes, it highlights what healthy marriage and relationship education is and, as Elizabeth mentioned, it is not, and it talks about what it does for children, families and communities.

Again within a real nice short clip so that's something you can download and use with potential stakeholders and partners within your own community and tell them not only about what healthy marriage and relationship education but the national partnership that you have and resource that you have in us the National Resource Center for healthy marriage and families.

And finally just a word about some of the other offerings that we have, we have a free virtual training center that currently has two online courses on it. One is - the first one, the introduction is an overview of healthy marriage and relationship education, same thing what it is, what it is not, and then its impact on children, families and communities.

But, I mean, anyone can sign up and register for and take and then there's a more comprehensive integrating healthy relationship education skills into social services course.

We estimate that it takes about three and a half hours and that I only walk you through seven core skills and principles of healthy relationships but it gives you tools, conversation starters, activity worksheets and other activities that you can use to integrate - to actually integrate these skills and principles into your supportive services and practices.

We have a Past Events Archive on our Website that hosts - that holds all of our archived Webinars. This will be one of the ones that goes there including all of your questions and answers and I think you'll hear more about that in a moment, and we do host integration institute trainings by one of our - that Elizabeth Tattershall mentioned is pending.

Those are for any federal, state, tribal or local agency can request a tailored training and technical assistance like in the food integration institution training.

And you will see on our Website not only general contact information on our About Us page but you'll find under our Training and Technical Assistance tab you'll find a Request Assistance sub-tab that allows you to fill out a form that gives us a better idea of tailored training that you might be interested in.

And to give you an idea of all of the things we can do for you this is just a summary of the expertise that we have behind our Center. Anything from helping your relationship education researchers to folks who have been involved in and developed tactics used in strategic planning and use of volunteers in policy drafting and analysis, et cetera.

So we do hope that you'll take advantage of our expertise. Rebecca, I believe I turn it over to you at this point.

Rebecca Fairchild:

Thank you so much everyone for your presentations today. At this time we'd like to transition to our question and answer period. We've had some questions submitted and I'd like to pose them to our presenters. I'd like to ask everyone to feel free to continue submitting questions in the Q&A pod on the right side of your screen.

Jane, this first question is for you. Our judges tend to be a very tough audience. How did you gain Family Court buy in?

Jane Riffe:

Well, I think timing was really on my side with that one. I was doing some research with some other specialists nationwide and decided that this is an area that was really of interest to me and I approached them.

And they were really looking this - when I say they, I went through the person who coordinates the parent education in this state, the co-parenting education is coordinated from the state supreme court and the staff person said this is really wonderful because we have ten different versions of co-parenting courses going on around the state and they're very different and we don't have any data on if they're any good or not.

And I was able to fill that need. So then what happened is, she invited me to a conference of the judges and yes presenting to about 70 judges was kind of interesting for me.

And they were very interested and I was really moved, I have to say, very moved by the compassion of many of the judges in terms of their wish to really be able to be of more use to the family than they could sometimes be behind the bench. So I think in this case it was a very fortunate timing thing and a staff person who saw the need and then she just kept pushing it - pushing it forward.

Rebecca Fairchild:

Thank you so much, Jane.

In order to respect everybody's time we would like to end the Webinar on time so we are going to - any other questions that are submitted we will make sure that they are answered in our question and answer document that will be posted on the Website under our events - Training, Technical Assistance and Events tab. Along with that question and answer document, the slides, the transcript will also be posted.

At the close of the meeting a survey will appear in your Web browser. Please take a moment to respond to help us improve our Webinars in the future. Just as a reminder, all of your responses are anonymous and it really helps us for our future Webinars. I would like to thank everybody for joining us today and have a great afternoon.

Operator:

That will conclude today's Webinar, thank you all once again for your participation.

END