

THE HEALTHY
MARRIAGE
INITIATIVE

Research demonstrates
that:

- Married couples seem to build more wealth, on average, than single co-habiting couples
- Children who live in two-parent, married households enjoy better health, on average, than children in non-married households
- Healthy marriages reduce the risk of adults and children either perpetrating or being victimized by crime.

INSIDE THIS
ISSUE:

AAHMI Research Conference 1

Spotlight on the Region: Region IV 3

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month 3

Responsible Fatherhood Information Sharing Conference 4

OFA Training and Technical Assistance Conference 4

Head Start/ Fatherhood Monthly Conference Call 4



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AAHMI Research Conference: An Exceptional Event!



The AAHMI Research Conference was held June 17-19, 2008 at the University of North Carolina, Chapel

Hill, with a captive audience of over 500 researchers, practitioners, and youth. This year's theme was **Building Strong and Healthy Families: Connecting Marriage Research to Practice** and featured such renowned speakers as author and TV Court show host, the Honorable Judge Glenda Hatchett and journalist and author, Roland Martin. The audience was also treated to a special viewing and facilitated discussion of the play, *Jump the Broom*, written and directed by Thomas Meloncon.



Diann Dawson, Director, Office of Regional Operations, opened the conference with welcome remarks. She also participated (on behalf of Assistant Secretary Dan Schneider) with Michael McGrady, President, National Head Start Association (NHSA) in the signing of a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ACF and NHSA**. The purpose of the MOU is to "provide a framework for coordination and collaboration" for the improvement of child well-being by "strengthening family formation through increased access" to the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives. Other ACF and NHSA staff also were on hand for this significant collaboration.



After the opening plenary, participants had the choice of attending five tracks: Healthy Marriage and

Responsible Fatherhood; Youth and Young Adults; Faith Based and Community Initiatives; Media, and Health. At the **Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood** sessions, participants heard from Dr. Rozario Slack (First Things First); Dr. Dennis Orthner (Jordan Institute for Families); Dr. Twinet Parmer (Central Michigan University); Ed Brown (Alabama State University); Dr. Alford Young (University of Michigan); Rev. Dr. Wallace McLaughlin (Fathers and Families Center); Dr. Lawrence Gary (Howard University); Dr. Joshua Murfree, Jr. (Albany State University); Dr. James Jackson (University of Michigan); M. Robin Dion (Mathematica Research), and Dr. Anne Jones (University of North Carolina). Session topics on responsible fatherhood included research and practices for program development in fatherhood as well as how young men view fatherhood. Healthy marriage experts discussed marital relationship satisfaction and trends in African American family formation.



The **Youth and Young Adults** track focused on the importance

of research in the development of effective marriage and relationship education and why this

(Continued on page 2)

Did you know...

Tasting the Four Elements is a less known and less practiced African American wedding tradition that requires the bride and groom taste: (1) *lemon* as representing the sour; (2) *vinegar* as representing the bitter; (3) *cayenne pepper* as representing the hot, and (4) *honey* as representing the sweet and delicious times of marriage. This ritual dramatizes the “traditional” promise to love “for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health.”

Cowrie Shells are worn by some African American brides as a necklace and/or as a decoration on the wedding garments. Cowrie shells are believed to encourage fertility. They were once used as money. Today they are used for purification and as a symbol of beauty and power.

Nily Glaser (2007). *African American Wedding Customs and Traditions*.

AAHMI Research Conference: An Exceptional Event! (continued from page 1)

type of information for youth is valuable. There was also a presentation from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and a workshop that focused on African American young men entitled, “Boys Into Men: Raising Our African American Teenage Sons.”



Participants at the **Faith Based and Community Initiatives** forum listened to such experts as Dr. Steven Beach

and Dr. Tera Hurt (University of Georgia); Debbie Dawes (RTI); Rev. Mark Edwards (Friendship West Baptist Church); Rev. Reginald Crump (Metropolitan AME Church); Dr. Kimberly Mills (Fulton County Juvenile Court); Tanya McDonald (South Los Angeles Healthy Marriage Demonstration Project); Nathaniel Lett (Beech Acres Parenting Center), Dr. Christine Lindquist (RTI), Earl James (Healthy Marriage Grand Rapids); Addie L. Richburg (National Alliance of Faith and Justice Strengthening Marriages and Families Initiative); Rev. Dr. Lonnie McLeod (LJM Consultants), and Rev. Dr. Wallace McLaughlin (Fathers and Families Center). They spoke about the importance of prayer and faith in marriages, which have traditionally been an area of strength in the African American community. Other topics included reconnecting ex-offenders to the family and community and programs for young people to encourage them to develop healthy and long-lasting relationships.

Many of the participants really enjoyed the **Media** track that featured speakers Dr. Mackenzie Cato (University of North Carolina); Kelleen Kaye (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy), and Thierry Fortune (MEE



Productions). Dr. Cato and Ms. Kaye emphasized the dramatic impact of the media on young people and encouraged participants to look critically at media. Mr. Fortune spoke about launching an effective media campaign.



The final track was the **Health** track that featured three very different yet critical topics; Diabetes and other health

challenges in marriages, depression, and domestic violence. In the first workshop, Dr. Carmen Samuel Hodge (University of North Carolina) and Dr. Larry LeFlore (Texas Woman’s University) discussed the physical and mental impact (giving statistics) on diabetes and other chronic illnesses on African American families. Dr. Anne Jones (University of North Carolina) and Dr. Tonya Samuel (Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health) talked about the link between depression and marital dissatisfaction. Finally, Dr. Duane Dyson (Violence Prevention Institute) and Dr. Tameka Gillum (University of Massachusetts) defined “intimate partner violence” (IPV) and how the media has played a part in desensitizing people particularly to violence.

In all, this conference was truly an exceptional event! Visit <http://ssw.unc.edu/jif/aaahmi08> where you may find the electronic conference proceedings!



Sharon Ross and Diann Dawson with the Honorable Judge Glenda Hatchett



Carolyn Meier and Joyce Thomas chat with Roland S. Martin

Spotlight On the Region: Region IV

Region IV Healthy Marriage/Responsible Fatherhood Partnership Forum held in Jackson, Mississippi

ACF Region IV sponsored a Mississippi Healthy Marriage Responsible Fatherhood Forum: **A Conversation: Connecting, Educating, and Networking with Communities** on September 10, 2008.

Collaborators for this event included: the Mississippi Department of Human Services; Mississippi Head Start Association; Mississippi Community Action Agency Association; the City of Jackson Mayor's Office and its Faith Based Initiative, and the Tree of Life Missionary Baptist Church. Over 150 practitioners, faith-community based representatives, Head Start and State staff and community stakeholders attended.

The goal of the forum was to explore three principal issues related to applying for, receiving and administering HHS/ACF funding: (1) Networking for Success, (2) Identifying and Overcoming Implementation and Operational Challenges, and (3) Exploring and Sharing Resources. This event also provided invitees with unique opportunities to exchange views and share information

around critical issues impacting families and communities, focusing on healthy marriage, responsible fatherhood and grant opportunities.

Reverend F.L. Blount, the Mayor's Faith Based Initiative Director hosted the event at his ministry *The Tree of Life Missionary Baptist Church* in Jackson, Mississippi. The catered breakfast sponsored by the church set the tone for the day of networking and information sharing. The Honorable Frank E. Melton, Mayor of Jackson electrified the group with information about fatherhood, boyhood, manhood, and crime, emphasizing where we go from here. The Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Human Services, Don Thompson welcomed the audience. Carlis Williams gave an overview of the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative's goals and objectives. Dr. Jeffery Johnson, Executive Director of NPCL, highlighted the ongoing work of the National Responsible Fatherhood program. Before and after lunch (sponsored by the Mis-

issippi Department of Human Resources), there were breakout sessions that facilitated networking among the attendees. The groups were guided in discussion by Mississippi Department of Human Resources and Head Start program facilitators.

This collaboration was made possible by and in keeping with ACF's MOU with the National Conference of Black Mayors. The region, in conjunction with local leaders will continue to develop and implement other such opportunities to positively impact families .

As a follow-up, e-mail addresses were obtained and linkages were established so that participants can continue to share and explore resources. The regional office e-mailed participants information to access the ACF Healthy Marriage/Responsible Fatherhood sites as well as information about funding opportunities and capacity-building resources.

Regional Specialists

I (CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT)

Josephine Hauer
jhauer@acf.hhs.gov
(617) 565-1123

II (NJ, NY, PR, VI)

Barbara Andrews
bandrews@acf.hhs.gov
(212) 264-2890, ext. 101

III (DE, DC, MD, PA, VA, WV)

Darlene Tart
dtart@acf.hhs.gov
(215) 861-4060

IV (AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, TN)

Bridget Minor
bminor@acf.hhs.gov
(404) 562-2903

V (IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI)

Vander Green
vgreen@acf.hhs.gov
(312) 886-4914

VI (AR, LA, NM, OK, TX)

Larry McDowell
lmcdowell@acf.hhs.gov
(214) 767-7327

VII (IA, KS, MO, NE)

Karen Elliott
kelliott@acf.hhs.gov
(816) 426-2799

VIII (CO, MT, ND, SD, UT, WY)

Sandy Naatz
snaatz@acf.hhs.gov
(303) 844-7346

IX (AZ, CA, HI, NV, AS, FM, MP, GU, MH, PW)

Mona Mann
mmann@acf.hhs.gov
(415) 437-7632

X (AK, ID, OR, WA)

Lewissa Swanson
lswanson@acf.hhs.gov
(206) 615-2573

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Know the Signs of Domestic Abuse

African Americans, especially African American women, suffer deadly violence from family members at higher rates than for other racial groups in the United States (Rennison & Welchans, 2001). Is someone you know being abused?

The *National Coalition Against Domestic Abuse* defines domestic abuse as "a pattern of behavior used to establish power and control over another person through fear and intimidation, often including the threat or use of violence, when one person believes they are

entitled to control another." In observance of **Domestic Violence Awareness Month**, spread the word that DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS NOT OKAY!

One of the most important things that you can do is learn the signs of an abused friend, co-worker or loved one. Remember that domestic violence does not always have a face—it can affect all shapes, sizes, colors, genders, economic classes and personality types. Most people who are experiencing domestic violence do not talk about it. Look for these

signs:

- Injuries and Excuses
- Absences from work or school
- Low self-esteem
- Personality Changes
- Fear of Conflict
- Passive-Aggressive Behavior
- Self-Blame
- Isolation
- Stress-related problems

If you suspect abuse, reach out and help! To learn more, visit: www.aardvarc.org (**An Abuse, Rape and Domestic Violence Aid and Resource Collection**).

Regional Roundup

Responsible Fatherhood Information Sharing Conference in Atlanta

Region IV held a **Regional Responsible Fatherhood** forum on September 18, 2008. There were 22 attendees from fatherhood programs representing eight States from Head Start and Community Action agencies throughout the region. These leaders were brought together to focus on enhancing father involvement in their programs and highlighting best practices throughout the region. Through this forum and related activities, Region IV is ensuring that regional fatherhood programs have the knowledge and skills needed to strengthen families and support the ongoing involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. This, in turn, will contribute to the healthy development of and improved outcomes for children.

Region III Kicks Off 2008-2009 Head Start/Fatherhood Monthly Conference Call Series in Philadelphia

For the third consecutive year, Region III is hosting the **Head Start/Fatherhood Monthly Conference Call** commencing in October and ending in May. The call is held the first Thursday of each month from 10:00 am to 11:00 am, and features presentations relevant to Healthy Marriage (added last program year) and Responsible Fatherhood.

The calls are intended to provide a forum for grantees and stakeholders to learn and share healthy marriage and fatherhood/male involvement programming strategies and information on related topics. They also provide peer-to-peer learning opportunities and the exchange of lessons learned.

The first call held October 2, 2008 featured opening remarks by Regional Administrator David Lett and a presentation by Patrick Patterson, Program Manager for the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center at Public Strategies, Inc. Mr. Patterson's presentation was entitled, "The Healthy Marriage Initiative and Head Start/Male Involvement: New Integration Strategies and Lessons Learned."

The public is invited to participate on the monthly conference call and is provided with a toll-free number and passcode. Interested persons can contact Amy Menefee at AMenefee@acf.hhs.gov to receive flyers on upcoming presentations and/or to receive a CD of the most recent presentations (once requested, participants will automatically receive a CD of the presentation two weeks subsequent to the call).

Next month's and December's call features James Worthy of Center for Urban Families (CFUF) conducting a two-part presentation entitled, "Fragile Families: How Fatherhood Programs Lead the Way." He will talk about how the responsible fatherhood program at CFUF in Baltimore, MD helps low-income fathers meet their parental responsibilities and learn what it means to be a good partner and husband.

ACF Happenings

Office of Family Assistance Hosts Training and Technical Assistance Conference for Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Grantees

The Office of Family Assistance (OFA) hosted the **Training and Technical Assistance Conference for Healthy Marriage and Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantees** on August 11-13, 2008 in Washington, D.C. The Healthy Marriage (HM) Specialists from each of the 10 Regional Offices were invited to attend and participate.

The conference was extremely helpful to grantees and Specialists in addressing significant subject matter relevant to the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives. Topics included: challenges and lessons learned; recruitment and retention; building and maintaining collaborations; project implementation; staffing and management; program evaluation, and federal grants administration. HM Specialists assisted federal project officers with moderating and facilitation.

OFA, in partnership with States, Territories and Tribes promotes temporary assistance and economic self-sufficiency for children and families. For additional information about Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood as relates to OFA grantees (including a list of grantees and grantee abstracts), visit www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa.



Please send comments or questions to Darlene Tart at Darlene.Tart@acf.hhs.gov

• Visit the AAHMI Website at: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/aa_hmi/AAHMI.html

• Visit the Healthy Marriage Initiative Website at: www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage

• Visit the Healthy Marriage Resource Center at: www.healthymarriageinfo.org

The Administration for Children & Families is an agency of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.