

NATIONAL RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD CLEARINGHOUSE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WEBINAR

Moderator: Nigel Vann

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2:00 pm EST

Operator: Good day and welcome to the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse Technical Assistance webinar. Today's conference is being recorded.

At this time, I would like to turn the conference over to Mr. Nigel Vann, Senior Director of Training and Technical Assistance. Please go ahead, sir.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much and good morning, good afternoon to everybody. As you'll see on your screen, today we're going to talking about ways to integrate healthy marriage skills into responsible father programs. So a big, big topic and we will so how far we can get with it today and conversation to be continued I suspect.

Before I go any further introducing the topic, let me just ask Matt Crews to do his standard reminder of how you ask questions and how to manage your screen.

Matthew Crews: Great, thank you, Nigel. Real quick, ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to go over how to ask a question during the duration of this call. A question can be asked at any time during the presentation. So just so you know that we've received your question, we will send you a standard reminder letting you know it's been received.

And if for some reason, your question doesn't get answered in time, we'll email it to you.

So if you click on the Q&A tab in the upper left-hand corner, you'll have box popup. Type your question in the box. Click on the work Ask and submit your question.

For any technical issues, if your screen's too small; hit F5. And if you want to ask a question, you cannot ask it when the screen is all the way enlarged. So just go ahead and bring it back down.

If you're having trouble heading, send us a message via the Q&A tool. And if you're interested in slides and you didn't get the ones that went out this morning, email us at info@fatherhood.gov. And that's all; back to Nigel.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Matt. Okay I was thinking quite a bit about how I wanted to introduce today's webinar. And I've got a few notes down here I'm going to go over before I bring representatives in.

But one of the things I was thinking about as we think about this topic is if we're going to integrate healthy marriage into responsible fatherhood program, what do we actually mean by responsible fatherhood?

And I looked at Kyle Pruitt's book *Fatherhood* just to see how he defined a responsible father. I just wanted to read his definition of a responsible father.

Take Time to Be a Dad Today

So this is Kyle Pruitt, he says, "By responsible, I do not simply mean making children behave and act respectful or providing financial security or paying child support. I mean an emotional commitment sufficient to honor one's obligation to sustain the life and soul one helped create".

So I think, you know, part of the question we're asking today then is how can a responsible fatherhood program help dads meet that emotional commitment? So what point in the fatherhood program can we best intervene to talk about healthy marriage skills?

And how can we raise the awareness for the fathers and the mothers of the benefits of healthy marriage skills for themselves and for the children. And if we look at, you know, the vast majority of fatherhood programs particularly back into 1980s and 1990s, by and large, particularly the early programs, they were working with either young teen dads or low-income, non-custodial, as I prefer to say, non-residential dads.

With the focus on meeting their immediate needs that had more to do with personal development, education, employment, child support etc cetera. And less with the relationship and parenting skills that would help dads meet the emotional commitment that Kyle Pruitt talks of.

But at the same time I also know, you know, there was a growing realization in that early work that's continued on that we can't sufficiently impact dads' relationships with their children if we're only working with the dads.

You know, we have to be able to engage with the mothers or at least held the dads gather some solid relationship skills to talk to the mothers. And this is actually one of the lessons learned from the Young Onward Fathers project in the early 90s that I did work on.

Yesterday I posted a couple of things to the Community Practice which I hope you've had a chance to look at or will be able to get later. I did just want to mention a couple of things from that.

I posted a research summary from (Adrian Burgess) of the Fatherhood Institute in the UK. And she's particularly talking about the transition to parenthood places unique strains on couple relationships.

So that's a really good point to intervene and help couples understand that they are going to suffer some strains to the relationship. And perhaps if they could come to a program that was dealing with healthy marriage skills, it would be a benefit for everybody.

And of course, the fragile family and childhood binge study that I'm sure everyone's familiar with points out that the majority of unmarried parents at the time of parent are actually together in the relationship and many are thinking of getting married. But within a few years of child's birth maybe those relationships have broken up and they're not co-parenting in a healthy way.

So if we're thinking when we can interact with fathers, perhaps a good moment is this prenatal, early year's time. And, you know, I was at the Brookings Institute event just the other week where they were sharing findings from the future of children report.

And, you know, Garfinkel was talking about the fragile family and child wellbeing study. And there were two couples there. One from Joe Jones' program in Baltimore and one from Mary Myrick's Healthy Marriage program in Oklahoma City.

And both of those couples made the point that they have committed to the healthy marriage classes because they have really heard strongly about the benefits of a healthy marriage for their children.

And so I think one of the things we really need to thinking about, how do we raise that awareness for more people so they indeed want to make the same commitment.

So with that said, in today's webinar we're going to be hearing various service strategies to include healthy marriage skills as a key component of programs designed to encourage and assist more men to become well-rounded, responsible fathers and husbands.

And I'm now going to introduce to you Erik Vecere, who is the Vice President of National Programming with the National Fatherhood Initiative. And many of you have had the chance to meet Erik at one of the manned-tables in 2010.

If you haven't just as a brief word of introduction, Erik's been with NFI since 2002. He's responsible for the development and implementation of NFI's community-based, school-based, healthcare, military and capacity programs across the country.

He's provided a wide range of technical assistance to fatherhood programs. He's presented at a lot of conferences. I had the pleasure of meeting Erik for the first time it must just have been two or three years after you came onboard Erik, I guess.

I did get to do a little bit of work with him down in Virginia a couple of times. So Erik is very well-grounded in this fatherhood field. He's also well-grounded in the healthy marriage work. As you'll see from his bio, he helped to create two healthy marriage coalitions in Southwest Pennsylvania and has thought a lot about this whole issue of how do we do healthy marriage as a part of responsible fatherhood.

So Erik, take it away please.

Erik Vecere: Okay, thanks Nigel and good morning or good afternoon to everyone depending on what time zone you're in.

During my section, I'm going to paint a broad stroke around the value of the healthy marriage skills in responsible fatherhood programs, some tools that can be used and some differences in the methodology between these two areas.

But first I really want to emphasize the fact that I understand that discussing the value of healthy marriage skills education in responsible fatherhood can be a challenge given the majority of fatherhood programs work in at-risk communities where, you know, relationships are stressed and frankly where marriage may not be part of the culture.

And let me just share an experience that just happened to me recently that highlights this but also I think shows some hope in bridging, you know, the responsible fatherhood programs with the healthy marriage programs as well.

I was delivering a facilitator training on our marriage readiness program for men and had taken participants through some session examples in the morning. At lunch, I was sitting with about six or seven of the participants at a table when one of the participants asked all of us, pretty much out of nowhere, whether we were all married.

And we all were so we answered yes. And he asked each of us how long we were married which ranged from 17 to about 50 years. And then he proceeded to share with us that he started as a participant in the fatherhood program.

Got his life together, you know, due in part, in large part, to that program. And then he became a case manager for that same program. And that's how he ended up at this particular facilitator training.

Now he said that he had never seen a marriage in any of his family history, as far back as he could remember. And until that day in training, he had never even considered marriage or thought it was attainable.

And he said as a result of the training on this marriage readiness program that he not only understood the benefits of marriage but realized he could actually work on skills to build a healthy marriage when the time is right.

So, you know, I think that is proof that we can bridge these two arenas together. And certainly we know that there are great outcomes if we can do that. So next slide please.

One thing I think really helps us to do that is to frame this idea of healthy marriage around what's best for kids versus what are my rights and what makes me happy. We have a way at in NIF of pulling together the research around father involvement.

And it's a formula that you'll see up there which is $P=M+L$ which is participation equals motivation plus location. And everyone wants dads to be more involved. But in order to do that they really need these two things.

And if we look at the two main components, you know, essentially we get low participation, low fatherhood participation where dads are not motivated to be involved fathers and programs are not motivated to help them.

So there's almost like two prongs to this. First of all there's the fact of whether the dads are motivated. But there's also an element of assessing the services and programs within the community. And looking at whether they are motivated to really help fathers or not or to what degree.

And then with location, we get low father participation when dads and programming for dads are not in the right places. So on the first piece of that, motivation, there's a survey that we did at NFI back in 06. It's the National Survey of Dad's Attitudes on Fathering.

And surprisingly, one of the things that came out was this idea of this replaceability factor. Over 53% of the fathers, the dads, felt that they could be easily replaced by mom. And 57% of dads felt that could be easily replaced by other men.

So, you know, this idea of fathers feeling that they can be replaced and that they don't have an irreplaceable role in their lives of raising their children certainly has an impact on motivation.

And one of the other things that came out of this is that we found half of men felt unprepared to be fathers. So these are two key areas that affect motivation. One is more attitudinal and is more skill based.

On location, a dad's location largely determines how involved he'll be. You know, I don't know I'm sure many of you have heard of the, you know, the three rules of real estate which is location, location, location.

Well it's very similar in a family situation. If a dad is physically in close proximity to his child, it's just going to create more opportunities for teachable moments and to build that relationship.

But also I mean there are some other questions that this location opens up as would be like where does he live? Is he connected to the right people? So we broaden it out even further. It's not just location physical but it's also connection with the right people in his life to stay connected with his child.

And this is where the clear connection is with healthy marriage skills. And more specifically, the relationship with the mom comes in. So the location of programming, services and support is critical.

And again, another question to ask, are we reaching fathers at their points of need or are we asking them to come to us? So, again, location being from the dad's perspective but also from our program perspective are we in the right location to reach those fathers?

Next slide please.

Here's some additional research that came out of our recent Mamma Says survey of mothers which we just released last year and it's available at the site that's up on your screen there.

The mothers who live with the fathers including those cohabitating but not married gave overwhelming high marks to fathers. While those mothers not living with the fathers reported on average, negative views.

So helping fathers understand how important it is to maintain a healthy relationship with his child's mom is critical. And healthy marriage skills can help. And this is again, that bridge between responsible fatherhood programs and healthy marriage skills because mom is essentially that bridge. And we're moving, you know, closer in that direction if we're addressing that.

The mothers not living with the fathers reported very low satisfaction with the fathers who had taken on new romantic, martial or step-father relationships. With each additional relationship or responsibility, the survey showed these mothers were progressively less satisfied with the father's parenting.

So the second bullet shows why it becomes difficult for dads to stay involved with his children who are from a previous relationship. Inevitably both mom and dad move into other intimate relationships, which of course complicates their ability to stay connected on a number of levels.

Things like, you know, their time being more restricted because of commitments with their new families. Or, you know, the new partners may discourage contact. There's a number of different dynamics that play out as that dynamic occurs.

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Here's another bit of research that supports of building a healthy relationship with mom. Of the children who live in father-absent homes, most of them do not have very much contact with their fathers.

Only 17% visit their fathers at least once a week while 83% see their fathers less than weekly. Forty percent of all children in father-absent homes have not seen their fathers at all in the previous year. And that's just, you know, staggering.

So what is happening is essentially is an absent father in the home becomes a distant father, who then becomes a disconnected father over time. And that's all connected to the relationship he has with the mother of his children.

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This is actually a diagram that I put together for some conferences that I have been a part about speaking to responsible fatherhood programs that sometimes had a difficult time trying to connect why healthy marriage versus healthy relationship.

So this chart is designed to show why we shouldn't establish healthy relationships as the ideal goal for even at-risk, low-income fathers and families. And why we should continue to strive for healthy marriages.

In the center column, you'll find the four general categories of relationship. The bottom category, no relationship, references a situation that was maybe a sexual encounter but it resulted in a child. But there really wasn't any other relationship beyond that.

The next category, broken relationship, refers to a situation where there was maybe some relationship initially but then it broke apart after the child was born.

The next category, healthy relationship refers to a stable relationship outside the marriage commitment.

And then finally at the top, you'll see healthy marriage is located there. And it's also important to understand that these categories are not static. So a couple, for example, could move from a healthy marriage to a broken relationship or another couple could move from maybe a broken relationship, up the column to a healthy marriage.

So there is some flux and dynamics within there. This is kind of put in here to kind of flow with the left and right arrows that you'll see. The arrow on the left side shows how a couple moves from self-centeredness towards selflessness as they move up the relationship column.

Okay when a relationship is built solely on a sexual encounter, self-centeredness is highest. In contrast, a healthy marriage requires each partner to put the others' needs before his or her own and think outside of him or herself.

So being married prior to having a child helps the couple raise empathy which is a key ingredient in becoming a good parent. So this leads to the right side of the diagram where we see this is really the true north, okay. And it comes back to my first slide and even some things that Nigel introduced.

So, true north really is child wellbeing. Because at the top, you'll see this whole chart is couched within the context of relationships with children involved. So once there's a child involved, you know, the rules really change.

If it's just a couple and there's no child involved, I mean there's some dynamics if they decide not to get married or whatever. But when there's a child involved, this changes the context.

So research shows on average, of course, that children's wellbeing increases the further up they are in these relationship categories. So a child does best in a healthy and stable marriage.

So if that is really the true north, then we're selling our children and families short if we're not at least discussing marriage as an option and providing couples with skill-building tools to attain healthy marriages.

And one of the things I've heard from, you know, a number of fatherhood programs is that, you know, they set their goals in other areas of programming such as job readiness, you know, child support payments and father involvement.

However they avoid kind of the same standards in this marriage topic because they don't feel it's attainable for their clients. So, you know, I can see that in a way as a double standard when they know that only a small percentage of the fathers that they serve will ever attain all of the goals that their program hopes to achieve.

But then with the healthy marriage, well with that we don't want to go there. So I do challenge fatherhood programs to think at that, reflect and think about that. If that indeed is really the true north of helping children and improving their wellbeing then we should at least be putting out there on the table.

And one last dynamic on this chart that I'd just like to explain would be if you look again at those levels of relationships in the center, you know, what happens if a program sets healthy marriage as the goal when a couple falls short?

Well that program has still helped that couple or that relationship achieve a healthy relationship. However, if a healthy relationship is the goal, if that's the top then the couple is really just a sneeze away from a broken relationship.

So really the bottom line is if higher child wellbeing is the ultimate goal, then we're doing a tremendous disservice to our clients if we don't at least put healthy marriage out on the table as one and the best possible paths for couples to pursue.

Next slide.

Now here's some research that's very fresh research actually that was just released this year. That reinforces this idea of qualitative, longitudinal and now intervention research findings indicate that a man's capacity to fulfill his role as father is embedded in his relationship with the child's mother.

Programs that are effective at strengthening the relationship between parents who live together have been found to increase father's involvement in parenting. So if a responsible fatherhood program can integrate a component that involves not only communication and conflict resolution skills but also involves the mom directly at some point, this bullet suggests better outcomes for father-child involvement.

A couple of ways that some programs that I know of accomplish this are doing a kick-off event for the entire family as they begin their fatherhood program. Another way is to bring the mom in when appropriate after he's concluded the fatherhood program to begin the co-parenting process.

For parents who are no longer together, the link of course is even stronger according to the research here. And that is because custodial parents which are usually the mothers have considerable control over non-custodial parent's access to their young children. And ongoing conflicts between parents about visitation is likely to lead to father's withdrawal.

And then, you know, so really it makes sense if you look at the last bullet, the fatherhood programs have found it difficult to change father's involvement with their children other than child support payments particularly if they have involved mom in that equation.

Next slide.

And I wanted just briefly, this was one of the tools that I mentioned earlier that I wanted to highlight because it's a great resource that some fatherhood programs are using to help moms understand the important roles fathers play in their children's life.

And also assess their level of maternal gate keeping. And so moms can be the gatekeeper. But they can also be the gateway between the child and the child's father. And we wanted to really leverage that in this module.

And basically it's three-session module. And it's called Mama's Gateway. And it's designed specifically for moms. And it helps them understand the role of the gatekeeper which essentially is to keep harmful situations out of her child's life.

But then it helps her understand the dynamics of power and control in relationships between men and women. And finally, how to monitor and minimize excessive gate keeping that shuts the father out of her child's life.

So it's not only been used to educate moms on this dynamic but also to engage mom around the recruitment process. Because as the mom becomes more self-aware about the important role dad plays in the life of her child she then encourages the dad to participate in the organization's group for fathers.

Next slide.

So continuing with some of the research that came out of this recent study you see cited on there, most young men see the value of marriage in their lives. But haven't really fully addressed their marriage and fatherhood readiness.

So again, this is another bridge here is that, you know, almost all young men in the current Fair Share program, saw themselves as marrying someday perhaps the mother of their child. But often describe themselves as too young to settle down.

So many of these young fathers have not seen healthy marriage modeled in their own life as was the example of the experience that I had with the gentlemen in the marriage readiness training that I was involved with.

The second bullet basically points to the fact if we don't reach the fathers when they're young it becomes more difficult to help them once they've allowed many years to pass. And that's cited in that second bullet.

And this is another tool that has helped organizations address that issue. It's called Why Not? And this is a marriage readiness program for man. And helps men look at their own marriage model, attributes there, I put in quotes, perfect wife, would have.

And take personal accountability for what they need to do attract that kind of woman. And it's not designed to push anyone into the marriage but it can help a guy recognize there's a lot of things he needs to address before he even considers that.

Next slide.

Let me just wrap up on the question of whether the purpose and methodology of integrating healthy marriage skills into responsible fatherhood programs differ from traditional couple-based healthy marriage programs?

So here's a simplified overview of the purpose of responsible fatherhood programs versus healthy marriage programs. And you can see that there are some differences in the purpose because healthy marriage skills could help responsible fatherhood programs enhance communication with the child's mom, increase the level of involvement with his child.

Teach men how to apply relationship skills to the workplace which is, of course, is a big issue with men in responsible fatherhood programs. Enrich co-parenting relationship and because healthy marriage skills can help a dad be more connected with his child, his motivation to provide child support is increased.

So you can see some of the similarities and differences of the purposes of healthy marriage on the second column. Those are typically what they would focus on in a healthy marriage versus the responsible fatherhood side.

And then last slide, a responsible father program tend to have target audiences. And of course, because of that it affects the methodology. Typically fatherhood programming is conducted with fathers who have little or no relationship with their child's mom, which means healthy marriage skills have to be preventative in nature and applied to the current or next relationship the father develops.

So this can be done by helping them making wise relationship choices and to help them know when the time is right to have anymore children. We have a 7 benefits of marriage for men brochure and a 12 things to consider before becoming a father brochure. And I find it's very helpful for a number of programs to help bridge that.

And as I mentioned earlier, another strategy is have fathers go through the entire program first. And then when appropriate, bring the mom in for some parenting, optional parenting sessions. And that's where, you know, co-parenting strategies are discussed.

Fatherhood programming is delivered to individual men and not couples. So naturally the group dynamics are different and the delivery, even as the session topics are different.

Men typically respond better to experiential activities. And that can be different when you have both a male and a female or couples in a group versus just men.

And then the last thing and this is just related to something Nigel said at the beginning that there's a very powerful moment to reach fathers and it's around that perinatal time. The child wellbeing, fragile family and child wellbeing study really expands on that.

But some fatherhood programs are targeting that expectant and new fathers as an opportunity to intervene. And have found that to be, you know, a successful time to reach them.

So I'm going to wrap up at that point and turn it back over to you Nigel?

Nigel Vann: Okay thank you very much Erik and great job of setting the table there. It really I think, you know, that should emphasize why this healthy marriage work is important with the context of the fatherhood work. And thanks for sharing some ideas as how we can actually start approaching that.

So now we're going to move to Gerardo or Gerry Valles who is the Responsible Fatherhood Program Manager for Education Service Center Region 19 Head Start in El Paso Texas.

And of your fellow grantees. He's just a few hours down the road from me here in New Mexico and so I have had the pleasure of visiting that program a couple of times and been very impressed by the energy and the great teamwork Gerry is fostering there with the workers.

He's been involved with Head Start families now for 25 years and been an advocate of fatherhood programs for 19 of those 25 years and worked with over 10,000 families during that time and presented at numerous conferences on ways to develop successful fatherhood and healthy marriage programs.

So Gerry's going to share with us a little bit about the approach they take in El Paso and just ways that you start with dads but get to the healthy marriage piece. So take it away Gerry, thanks.

Gerardo Valles: Thank you Nigel. Good afternoon. I think it's already safe to say good afternoon. It's already 12:35 with us here. And before I start, I want to go ahead and tell a little bit about our program. If we can please go to the second slide.

We decided to go ahead and use the Maslow hierarchy technique. And let me tell you why a little bit. We are in El Paso, Texas. We are right next to New Mexico and ((inaudible)) which is another nation, Mexico.

Our family basically is 75 -- I'm sorry -- 81% Latino basically first and second and third generation. Because of that, we do a lot of research. Our Head Start program has 32 Head Start sites and we have over 4300 families that we deal with.

The reason why we use the Maslow hierarchy of needs is because of our fathers believe in that first. Their first and main concern is the physiologically which is basically food and shelter.

So we decided to go ahead and start with that theory. Why? Because our executive director strongly believes that in order for the Head Start child to be an optimal way of learning, you need stabilize the family setting like Erik was saying.

It's impossible to work only with the dad. Because you do more once you start working with a family as a whole. So once we approached that mission that we have that we can stabilize that family setting, we believe that the child will be in a optimal way of learning because that family nucleus will be stabilized.

So that's one of the reasons why we use this theory. Next slide please.

Our approach to this theory is through the case-management approach. Since we have a large number of Head Start programs, we needed first to identify who was going to be coming to our program. We needed to plan then intervene, follow-up and evaluation.

And we do that constantly because we have an array of services here. One of the services is research and development that is a constant contact with our week we speak with them. And they're telling us what we're doing and what we can do to approach it differently if there's any changes that we need to do.

So we're very lucky with that in our program. The second slide please.

Our program, we'll focus on the development and the support of the father and basic roles our fathers undertake as individuals, spouses, parents, and citizens. What do I mean by this?

We started our program we decided to go ahead and break it into three areas in a wrap-around program, a wrap-up area. We wanted to go ahead and teach the fathers who they are as a man, who they are as a spouse and who they are as a father.

We also understood that in doing that, we needed to go ahead and provide some type of economic stability trainings for them so they can earn a little bit more. That's providing a better life for the spouse and the child.

If we can go to the next slide please.

And the overall project management, like I said, was implemented in El Paso County. The El Paso County has about five suburbs and four of those suburbs could be considered extremely poor, low-economic suburbs.

So that's one of the areas where we said we need to go ahead and implement these programs. By doing that, we developed four areas of interest in El Paso County. One in the Northeast, one in the Lower Valley, one in the Central, and one in the Upper Valley. Because we have different Head Start sites and all of them are completely different even though we have a 85% Latino population.

The Central area might have more first-generation Hispanics. The Northeast area might have first, second and third and African-American and Asian. And then Upper Valley and Lower Valley are mixed.

So we decided and take that partially and go ahead implement our program and see how we could make changes. One of the programs -- and if you could please change the slide -- is the identify formation.

This is called ISMX. What we do here is that we work with the dad in trying to understand who they are. Where they come from. What idiosyncrasies they bring back from their own families and how we can change this.

And some of the topics that we do is your goals and values and that's the first one that we do. Because it's very important for the fathers to know what goals and values you have and what is it that's hurting your marriage. Or what is it that you want from this so you increase your communication skills.

Then we go into manhood stereotypes. How do get help. How to become self-sufficient and dealing with stress and anger management. Within these classes, it's an eight-hour session and they're very intense. We do a lot of trainings. We do a lot of activities.

The fathers really bring in their most inner-self feelings once they start opening up because it's important to go ahead and work as a group. The facilitator, like it says, only facilitates the sessions. Fathers are the ones that are learning their skills on their own because it's being facilitated by the facilitator.

Once we finish this hour session which is very important with the fathers, the following -- if you can change the slide, please -- the following session which is another eight hours it's called Marriage and Relationship Building.

This is where we invite the fathers and the spouses to join us for an eight-hour session. This is very important and we believe this is what's really making this program a success. Because the spouse and the father come in. And they dialogue what type of relationship they're having and what they can do to make it better.

We do a lot of activities with them. Some of them are escalation and timeouts. And this is very important because as you know, where there is a marriage there is a lot of fighting. And we don't know when to stop.

Also we talk about validation and withdrawal, negative interpretations. Or we've got issues. Within this session, it's very important for me to check and see how the couples are responding and I become very joyous when I see couples that come in and they sit separately.

And by the end of the session, they're holding hands and kissing. That shows that we're doing something for them. ((Inaudible)) at the session we give the books so they can read them. And we have purchased books through the program which is a Party for Your Marriage, Men are from Venus; Women are from Mars and some activities books that we ask for them to do together.

Now this is very important so we won't get confused. When the mothers come into their responsible fatherhood program, the Head Start will pay for it. So fathers are being paid by our grantee, the OSA. But when the mothers come in, we take over.

Because we believe that it's important for the couple to be together. And this is where couples believe and understand that their marriage is worth fighting for. And for the fathers that are coming in that are

single, they start thinking they either want to go back to their family or they want to get a partner that is compatible with their beliefs.

And we have a lot of success stories in this. One to mention, right now when I was walking to this meeting, I received a call from CPS, and Child Support Services in Texas regarding we have a dad that I believe Nigel read about him and they call him the Big ((inaudible)) type guy that he was problems with his wife because the wife is doing drugs.

So they asked for me to be in their unification meeting with CPS and them. And I do believe that the couple asked especially for me and the facilitators because they don't feel comfortable if they go on their own. So they want us to talk about it.

That's the relationship and that's the bond that we get with the parents to the point that they will tell other agencies that they want us to be present. Because when they come here and we teach them how to be a couple again, that for them is something that they're not going to forget because they lost it.

And so you have to understand that with our population, Hispanic population, we tend to be very proud of our problems. And it takes a lot for them to open up with us. But once they open up to us, we become like their family, like their support system.

So they come for us for any problems that they have. So that's why this goal is very important. As Erik was saying, in order to increase marriage relationships and decrease divorces with a fatherhood program I think that it's imperative that we work with the mothers in that area.

Our next slide if you could, please is called parenting skills. After we finish with the mothers, the following Saturday which is another eight-hour skills training, we call it I, as a Parent, as a Father. We bring in the dads alone and we teach techniques and what to do with their children.

Basic, simple techniques that they can do instead of not spending time with them. You know, as you know most of the fathers, our mentality is that we're not supposed to spend time with our children because that's our idiosyncrasy. And then we grow and ask those fathers that question, they feel less proud because their fathers never did.

So basically our goal is to break that vicious cycle. And by doing that, we invite them for another eight-hour session. And in there we talk about wide-awake fathering, fatherhood today, are dad's really unique, a father's influence and so art of a father as a father as a role model.

This is very important because most of the dads, they know that but they seem to forget about it. And by coming to this session, they bring those skills back.

Within this session, we have purchased backpacks with different activities that we can do with the father and the child. We go through that backpack and we tell them how they can do those activities. Next slide please.

Now the wrap-around program, most of our fathers they either are earning minimum wage. They don't have a high school diploma or GED. And so what we have done is we created economic stability area which is wrap-around.

We have classes for them to obtain their GED or ESL classes. We purchased ((inaudible)). And we also have re-trainings for the dad such as in welding, electrician, CDL driver of school buses.

Or if they want to go to higher education, we also give them that training. We tell them what university they can attend and what they can study. We believe that this is going to help the family.

Our challenge in this is that our fathers are still stuck on the first area of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Since our fathers don't have that much communication, they need to provide for their families.

So we're having a hard time trying to keep the fathers that are attending the GED classes or the ESL because of their work hours, days, and they just need to provide for the family.

So for them, the main concern is providing financially for that family. I believe that is one of the successes that we're doing because by doing this classes, the father has a better understanding on why they need to change their ways so they can provide for their families better.

Even though we're having good success on the GED classes and the ESL, we would love to have more parents attend. But we have seen an increase throughout the four years that we have been doing this program.

We strongly believe in the responsible fatherhood program. And we are planning to sustain this program when the grant ends because we are firm believers that we can make changes. We can go to the second slide.

The curriculums that we have used are within my reach and we can -- our reach. Please take into consideration that when we went to this training, it really doesn't fit our culture. So we asked permission to move it around and to make it fit with our culture.

And it's been working very great. And, of course, the last one is fatherhood development that we've been using for the past 10 to 15 years which we believe is one of the best programs that are out there. Because it's giving us a lot resources and we've had a lot of experience with this.

And we just feel very comfortable with this program. Do you have any questions on this presentation?

Nigel Vann: Well thanks very much Gerry. We'll get to questions at the end. People will be asking those...

Gerardo or Gerry Valles: Yes.

Nigel Vann: Sorry? And we do encourage you to ask questions. So I think, you know, that what Gerry just explained is a really a good example of a program that can address the basic needs that men come to father's programs with.

But yet with the structure, having these different components keep them involved and bringing the spouse in to talk about the healthy marriage skills. You know, I think too often in father programs we spend so much time helping guys deal with their immediate needs, and their personal needs, employment needs, transport needs, etc., that as we satisfy those needs, we've not got involved as much.

And a lot of times we can help get a job or we've helped them be more involved with their kids, then they have less time to keep coming in. But we do need to find ways to keep stressing this and to work with the mother too.

So I think we have a good model of a program here to think about.

So let's move onto our final presenter who is Seth Eisenberg. Seth is the Project Director of the PAIRS Relationship Skills for Strong South Florida Families. This is a healthy marriage grant.

So we invited Seth to come talk about what PAIRS do in terms of their couple's work and particularly because Seth has been thinking a lot about ways in which they do engage men currently and how they can sort of make this some more of a fatherhood focus as well.

I've had the pleasure of working with Seth on a couple of projects prior to the position I'm in now and was really taken by the PAIRS approach as with other healthy marriage approaches.

But, you know, I think what really attracted me to the PAIRS approach is that it is in many ways very similar to what happens in a traditional responsible fatherhood program. And you create a safe space.

You help folks reflect on their personal histories. You help raise their awareness of their role as parents or as spouses. But then you start giving them some new skills. You start working on their attitudes and you give them tools to work with.

And that's what PAIRS does particularly well. And as you'll see in Seth's bio, he has a very impressive bio. He's trained more than 100,000 instructors in the PAIRS program.

He's co-authored various PAIRS curricula. Has himself delivered PAIRS classes to thousands of participants and just done an awful lot of good things out there. Seth is a very magnetic personality who will share with us now for the next 20 minutes some of what PAIRS does to engage men and to really raise the awareness of how healthy marriage skills can benefit child wellbeing and self wellbeing. Seth.

Seth Eisenberg: Thank you Nigel. Thank you very much for your kind words. And thank you and everybody on this call for the really meaningful work you're doing in communities across the country to help children, to help fathers and the marriages and families in which children grow up.

I really do believe our work is vital, sacred work and it's an honor to be able to share a little bit about the PAIRS approach and experience specifically engaging and empowering men through marriage and relationship education with all of you.

And I'm sure there's also much that we could learn from each of you on this call.

One of my favorite posters that we often share when we start a PAIRS class is a poster that says, this life is a test. It is only a test. If it were a real life, you would have received instructions.

And while we tell that sort as a joke; it's very true especially for so many of the men who show up for PAIRS classes on their own through adult education programs.

Certainly men who participate through prison reentry programs as well as men who come with their significant others, sometimes with their kids, sometimes with their spouses to marriage education programs that are taught across the country and actually throughout the world.

And what we've tried to do in the PAIRS approach which started as a semester-long course is today taught primarily as a nine-hour program over an intense weekend or over several three-hour sessions over sequential weeks

Is not give only men skills to allow them to much more deeply understand themselves and the people they're closest too but also shift the paradigm of how men look to the people they are closest to for navigating the challenges and opportunities of their lives.

And this if you can go to the next slide, this is very much based on a whole body of knowledge that became popularly known many years began doing the work that we started in the 70s at American University and have expanded across the world since then.

But Daniel Goleman really said it best. When he talked emotional intelligence. And that very much reflects the goal that we have in reaching out and working to empower men specifically in the area of their closest relationships, which is to empower them through social and emotional learning. And by

that we mean as Goleman defined it, a set of skills including the ability to control our impulses, self-motivation, empathy and I can't stress important developing empathy is and social competence in interpersonal relationships.

We find that men generally look to the examples of their own fathers and grandfathers as models for the relationships they create in their own lives. And many of them either grew up without dads in their lives.

My parents divorced when I was three and nearly everybody that I work with either their parents weren't married or their parents broke up early or for whatever reason, the relationships that they grew up in were not models for what they wanted to create in their own lives.

So what we focus on is that it's not that's there anything wrong. It's not there's anything broken or defective with the men who participate in marriage and relationship education. It's really that they never had a chance to learn these skills.

And just like wouldn't throw somebody into a job, career, profession or anything of the sort without giving them training and skills to be successful, that's very much what this is about.

And we have found that that approach makes it safe for men. And that the skills they learn and the experiences they have with those skills empower them in their closest relationships that it makes a change that very often will touch the lives of their families for generations to come.

Next slide please.

And our work grew out of several different fields. I grew out very much of the addiction field where Dr. Daniel Casriel for I don't know if any of you have heard of him but he was doing the most innovative work in the country in the 60s and 70s looking at what was it that was causing so many people to make destructive decisions, significantly men.

Often decisions that showed up through addictions to drugs and alcohol. And why was it that so many seemingly helpful interventions were making a difference only briefly. But they weren't able to make a lasting difference.

And Dr. Casriel wanted to understand what was causing that and what he could do that went far beyond putting a band-aid on a difficult situation. So what he recognized is that what shows up as destructive decisions is more often than not a reflection of deprivation of biological needs.

That while we're aware of basic biological needs such as air, food, water and shelter. What Casriel found is that most of what was leading people to make very destructive decisions in their own lives is because they weren't getting their needs for bonding met.

And that if you could both treat the impact of those destructive decisions and also help people learn to create lives in which they got their needs for bonding met, then you could make a lasting difference.

And around the same time Virginia Satir who wrote People Making and Cojoint Family Therapy and many other books but really deeply and profoundly the understanding of how family systems work with each other.

Started to look particularly at how we communicate in our closest relationships. And recognized that so much of what we learn and live in particular that enables us to be successful in our jobs is not only not helpful as fathers and as husbands or significant others. But it's actually often the exact opposite.

But what many people are doing is they're taking skills that help them succeed in one area of their life and bringing them to others. And what she recognized that among many of the things is that if you people learn skills for leveling, for making sure we weren't placating, blaming, competing, or distracting our closets relationships.

But you created new opportunities for family systems not just survive but to actually thrive. And Virginia's who is the First Chairperson of PAIRS, her work, hers and Casriel's, and Bach and Gordon as I'll mention in a moment, is very much woven throughout the tapestry of the work that we have found is so empowering to men and couples and families.

George Bach also in the 70s had gone around the country and interviewed murders in prison. And probably all if not...Probably just about all of them were men who were sentenced to life in prison for committing very heinous acts.

And what he found in his interviews of these men is that most of them had hurt people they had once loved. And that was surprising. That wasn't something that was well known in the field before that time.

And that it wasn't that these men were born to cause such destruction and hurt people. It was that they didn't have in many cases, constructive outlets for very strong emotions.

And so many of the rules that they had learned in their lives that said we have to keep all this inside was becoming explosive. And it as becoming explosive towards people in one minute, they would give their lives to protect. But in another, they were very much hurting.

And the Lori Gordon the founder of PAIRS really wove all this together into a course that teaches skills for love and intimacy. And we certainly found through research since the 70s that love and intimacy are skills that can be learned.

That it's not like intelligence, you know, intellectual intelligence. That emotional intelligence including the skills to sustain really happy, loving, intimate relationships can be learned. That you can teach empathy.

And that once people have these skills, for the most part, even for people in very distressful situations, they become building blocks to marital stability, resiliency, and the fulfillment of their dreams. And that's a really important phrase.

It's not that our work is about telling people how to fulfill our dreams. It's that men in particular realize very quickly is that this is to empower them to fulfill the dreams that they have for their lives. Next slide.

And right at the center -- next -- right at the center of our approach and I know this slide looks a little complicated. But I wanted to share because it's the roadmap of the work that we do.

And at the moment when people get this roadmap in PAIRS classes that there is very often a paradigm shift that shows up many, many, many years later. And what this roadmap really spells out is that the key to being on the happiness or unhappiness side of this, it's not about winning the lottery.

It's not about paying off the mortgage and it's not even about getting that promotion at work. But the key to happiness or unhappiness in life is creating a life in which we get our needs met.

And we're all very aware that we have needs for air, food, water, and shelter. That's common knowledge from our earliest moments. But what many people don't realize is that we often have a biological need for bonding.

For getting our needs for emotional openness. The ability to be fully yourself with another person and physical closeness, affection. And that when we create a life in which we get our needs met we tend to experience it even when the storms and the tsunamis and the challenges and the potholes.

We tend to experience it with happiness, pleasure; a desire for what we think will be a pleasure and feeling the love. And we're much more likely as men to have health, and energy, and wellbeing, and flexibility, and creativity.

And the ability to be open and share and to be personally responsible for our actions as fathers, as husbands, as workers in our communities and the capacity for real intimacy.

And real intimacy is often very different from what men may have seen from their fathers and grandfathers before them especially many of the immigrants who come from all over the world where their specific ideas of what gender roles look like in different societies and in this country too.

For a long time, marriage was about security, stability and raising kids. But it's only after World War II and increasingly since then that marriage became about love and intimacy. About being each other's best friends.

Because for a long time, if woman weren't happy in relationships they really didn't have a choice. They had to stay. But as they have beginning with the right to vote and then entering the workforce in large numbers during World War II as the men were off to war.

And then perusing higher education developed the freedom to say if I'm not happy; I don't have to stay, which is a freedom that many of their mothers or grandmothers and generations before didn't have.

So this becomes the work of a relationship. Is how do we create a life in which we get our needs met and understanding that the need for bonding is unique. That we can breath, and eat, and drink, and even build a tiki hut for ourselves if we want to. We can get those needs met on our own.

But to get our needs of bonding met; it takes another person who wants to do that with this. That it takes being able to create an environment where it's safe for other people to be emotionally open with us and where we can be real with other people.

That we don't have to wear a mask. Or we don't have to act one more when inside we're feeling something very different. And that when you add to that affection that that is where so much of the joy and happiness and fulfillment of life comes from.

So that's a very important foundation to our work with men. And as they see that also recognizing that when we're going through the symptoms of unhappiness, illness, fatigue, depression, rigidity constriction where we become closed, guarded.

And even when we turn to so many antisocial behaviors including the range of addictives it's very often to mask the pain of not getting our needs met. So it's really in our self-interest.

It's not that we're saying, you should do this as a favor because you're responsible and you have obligations although we certainly believe that's true. That isn't the focus of our approach with men.

The focus of our approach with men is how to have a life where you can really be happy and thrive and have the greatest opportunities to achieve success and the fulfillment of the dreams that are most important to you.

Next slide please.

And much of that comes from teaching very practical skills. That we have found that's it important that we teach skills that aren't great concepts. It's not that we -- there are lots of great concepts in the world.

But what are our commitment is, is that from the very first moments in our work with men and with couples, that they learn skills that produce an immediate benefit. That it makes sense. That's it logical and rationale. And that it's instructions that are easy to follow.

And this is one example, skills like the daily temperature reading. That on regular basis, ideally once a day, with your kids, with your wife, to connect on these five areas to share appreciations.

To let people know some specific things you acknowledge and appreciate about them. To keep each other up-to-date with new information and to make sure that you're staying up-to-date with the people that are important to you.

To check out puzzles. To check out whatever you're wondering about; not to make assumptions because assumptions are so devastating to relationships. To normalize differences. To recognize that concerns are a very normal part of any close relationship.

And that the problem isn't that there are differences or concerns but that we need constructive ways to share them and ask for what we want instead. So to do that and then to make it safe for others and to regularly talk out loud about our wishes, hopes, and dreams. About what's most important for us and to encourage others to do the same.

And that, well that's only one of dozens of examples of the skills that we teach and that men have reacted very positively to.

What's important is that it's simple. That it makes sense. That from a third-grader to a PhD scientist, they get it. And that they fill context with whatever is unique to their life. And that they see the results of doing that.

Next slide.

Another very key concept that's been important to men in producing lasting change with the men that we work at with in all different environments is really giving them a language to understand emotions in themselves and others.

And to release emotions safely. Because while girls are often raised to know it's safe to confide that they can be vulnerable. If a young girl is sad, in most cultures they're comforted. They're encouraged to share what's on their mind.

But it's very different boys. You know, boys are taught don't be a cry baby. You know, don't be scared. You know, a man is supposed to be this way or that way. So what so often happens with boys as we grow into men is we stuff those things inside.

You know, and before you know it, we've got so many layers of anger and sadness and anger, and fear, stuff on top of layer on top of layer on top of layer. And the problem with that is that it's smoothers all the good feelings.

That the more that we're following those rules as men that says not to feel those things and certainly not to show those things, the more we are smothering the opportunity to feel relief, ease, happiness, pleasure, desire and love.

And that we see that leaking out all over. In fact many of the times we see that leaking out is what leads men to get in trouble. We see it leaking out through sarcasm, through labeling, through blaming other people, through becoming contemptuous, or putting up big stone walls.

And we, ourselves, pay a huge price for that. And if we can have safe, easy, understandable tools for releasing that energy then we don't have to dirty fight, not towards our children; not towards our significant others.

And so what we see is that not only do the issues that may have once become conflicts they're no longer destructive. But it actually leads to this incredible experience of closeness and intimacy that many men never saw in their lives. They never had an experience, had the opportunity to experience.

Next slide.

What we have found from doing this work and we've been doing this, as Nigel mentioned, we're a grantee. We're delivering the healthy marriage grant here in South Florida and working with quite a few other grantees across the country.

And when we look at men in particular, and we're working thousands. But in this research follow-up we followed up with specifically with men, 419 men, 6 to 12 months after going through a nine-hour class.

We saw significant improvements across the board. And it's interesting to mention that we even saw significant improvements in their sex lives. And we don't even mention sex in our brief programs. We have follow up programs that, you know, explore sexuality and sensuality in detail.

But in our brief programs, we focus on the emotional aspect of relationships. And we have seen men improve dramatically their ability to resolve conflicts, to confide, to share appreciations. To communicate and their overall satisfaction.

And what's even more important to us than this, next slide, because this wasn't surprising from our experience with so many thousands. But what's particularly important is the impact on highly distressed participants.

And by highly distressed, we mean people who've measure on the Dyadic Adjustment at scale at a point where it's very unlikely that they're going to stay together. It's a level of distress that is beyond the ability to sustain.

And it doesn't mean that people can't stay together in sort of demilitarized houses where they be together physically but they're certainly not together emotionally or intimately. But what we found is that for highly distressed participants, that of those in the very highest risk categories, 77%, showed significant improvement that was sustained 6 to 12 months after the training.

That this was even more true for men than women and that was very important information to us. Because for most men that get into a difficult place, it's not because of any bad intentions. It's often because there's something by their nature that's keeping things from working.

It is most often that they don't have the skills because they never had a chance to learn them. And what we saw is of the participants in the high risk group prior to training, for 47%, nearly half, not only did they improve. But they actually jumped to the very highest level of pleasure and satisfaction.

And that's very important because all that says to us is that even couples who have already made a decision to separate, maybe begun the process of separating or divorcing if they're actually married. That almost half of them will stay together very happily and three-quarters of them will see significant sustainable improvements.

Next slide.

So for us, the question is where is the best place to recruit men? And as I say that I want to stress that much of why PAIRS started as an educational approach because for many years, PAIRS was taught as part of mental health practices. And it was an interesting thing to add educational class to mental health practices.

But what we found especially working with the military is that many men who weren't open to going to counseling or therapy for a whole bunch of reasons that made sense. You know, fear of how it would affect their careers because they didn't want to get a diagnosis. They didn't want to look bad.

They didn't want people to think that they weren't competent. But they're open to education especially if it's brief. If it makes sense logically and rationally. And if they see significant, meaningful results that tie with the dreams and the values that are so important to them.

So when we look to recruit men in particular and we have found for men that are in relationships that once we recruit men it's very easy in most cases to recruit the women in their lives. The areas where we find it's best to focus is certainly after deployment.

There are nearly 2 million people who have been affected by combat deployment in Afghanistan and Iraq. And especially those who are connected to the National Guard and other veterans, a very, very important group to reach out to nationwide.

Many of them are struggling with issues of post-traumatic stress disorder. Many have been affected by traumatic brain injury. We've had great success bringing PAIRS programs to those communities.

And seeing that once you can open the lines of communication, make it safe to confide, make it safe to release emotional intensity that couples that were very shutdown become very close to each other again.

As others have mentioned, certainly during the period of pregnancy is a time that men are very open to learning together with significant others even if they're not married.

Prison reentry has been an important work field for us. We started doing work actually in Israel with a major university there more than 15 years ago teaching these skills to men during the approximately six months before they were released. Teaching it to their significant others outside of prison and have seen sharp drops in recidivism as a result of that.

Job training, men are very used to learning skills to succeed in their careers. So adding programs that teach skills for emotional intelligence, emotional literacy, has fit well in job training. Men have found it very safe to go through programs in trade schools, community colleges, neighborhood associations such as YMCAs.

Certainly men who are connected to the faith-based community such as churches, synagogues, mosques and the like are very receptive to what's recommended by the clergy within those communities and that often makes it safe for them to participate.

And the Internet both in terms of marketing, getting messages, our blog at fatherhoodchannel.com is a place where we reach thousands of men literally every day who are interested in learning and often exploring from the privacy of their home.

And we've had hundreds of people go through online classes. And I've heard repeatedly from men in particular that being able to do programs from the safety of their own home even if it's just a brief preview has been very important to them.

Next slide.

Some of the messages that are really important for men whether we're engaging them online or in person that have been particularly effective is that A, nothing's broken. That this is not that there's something broken or defective about you've never had the chance to learn. Things you may not have had a chance to learn.

And it doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you or your relationship or anybody else. It's a chance to learn knowledge and skills that can make a difference. That we don't use scar tactics. That it's not a matter of saying, you know, if you don't do this, here's what's going to happen to your child, or to your spouse, or to your life.

That that's the equivalent for us of dirty fighting. But we focus on their values. That engaging men is very much begins with what's important to you. And how is this going to help your dreams come true. And we make sure that every interaction from emails, to phone calls, to their interactions in classrooms and afterwards is safe and consistent with the values that we're sharing.

That we focus consistently that this is not therapy. That what we're doing is education. We're not there to tell people how to solve their problems or whether they should turn right or left. We're there to empower them basically driver's ed for relationships.

Meaning, here's how you can operate the vehicle. Who should be in the vehicle with you. Whether it should be a Toyota or a Jeep. You know, whether you should drive to the mall or across the country; those are your decisions.

We want to give you the tools through education to help you make the decisions that fit for your life and be successful. That it's logical and rational. That it's practically useable skills. And that we always invite; we never inflict.

And we have seen many cases, time and again, having done this for nearly three decades now that for some when you plant seeds, it bears fruit immediately. For others, it may take years. That we recognize that this is always an invitation. That we are never there to inflict. But that's very, very important at keeping it safe.

Next slide.

And when we're talking about engaging men, the process of enrollment is particularly important; that men generally are not going to show up eager to participate because they saw a flier or an ad maybe from a newspaper or a blog article. But that it takes specifically intentionally enrolling them.

And enrolling them always follows five steps. One is creating a background of relatedness. That they're having a conversation with someone that can connect to. That they feel understands them, shares some similarities in terms of their life experiences. And that they feel has credibility and that they can relate to.

And that from that foundation because that's really the floor that we're standing on to talk together about the possibilities that are important to them in their life. You know, what do they want? Do they want success in their career?

Do they want to be able to stay in the military? Do they want to earn more money? Do they want to be, you know, better able to nurture their children? What are the possibilities that they want?

And then to seize the opportunity. To really speak into those possibilities in a way that shows them that doing this expands the opportunity for them to have their dreams come true. And certainly to extend the invitation to invite them to participate.

That so often we see breakdowns because we do a great job in the first three areas. But for whatever reason, people hesitate to take a stand for a man to participate. So ask. Extend the invitation and encourage them to resolve whatever they need to participate.

And certainly to complete the enrollment cycle. Following up by email, by phone, you know, however, whatever is appropriate for your local programs.

Next slide.

And this all brings me back to this great quote that I'm sure each of you are familiar with but it bears repeating. You know, that Benjamin Franklin said many years ago and many have repeated in different ways. But the definition of insanity is doing the same things over and expecting different results.

And that's very much a core message in our work. We regularly share with men if what you're doing is working for you; keep doing it. But if it's not; PAIRS and other programs like PAIRS are a chance to try on something new and see what becomes possible.

And in the far, far, far majority of the cases of sharing this with men and encouraging them to participate and enrolling them not only in participating but actually in practicing, in doing what they're learning, we see that it creates new opportunities for closeness with their children, with their partners; even for those who are broken up to connect in a healthy way with their partners.

And for those who are together, to be able to nurture and sustain relationships so that their children grow up with models that will really enable them to see some many of their own dreams come true.

So Nigel, that's sort of an overview and I'll be happy, with the other presenters, to answer any questions that any of you have. And also, our website at PAIRS.com, that's p-a-i-r-s.com, and our blog at fatherhoodchannel.com is the place where we share, you know, a wealth of information and free resources.

And we have more information on the research studies there. Samples of curriculum and are eager and delighted to support your efforts around the country to the best of our ability.

Nigel Vann: Well thanks very much Seth. Yes, I think you really captured there what's exciting to me and I think a lot of other people as well involved in this work. You know, just in the way in which programs like yours create a safe space for men and couples to do that personal reflection and awareness building.

And then open themselves up to share things that they've perhaps never shared before. You know, I always talk about enabling men to take off that mask of masculinity. And I think you captured that very well there.

Seth Eisenberg: Thank you.

Nigel Vann: So time for a few questions here. One person wrote in and this is a statement rather than a question. But one person wrote that I think that we have to be careful when we say that those from at-risk communities value marriage less than those not at risk. It is a dangerous generalization.

And I certainly agree with that. And I'm not sure which presenter maybe remarked on that. But, you know, I'm very familiar with the studies, for instance, the Kathryn Eden did talking to single mothers in the Philadelphia area in certain neighborhoods.

And certainly emphasizing with them but it wasn't that they didn't want to get married. They just didn't find any marriageable men in their communities.

So would anyone like to comment on that; any of the presenters?

Seth Eisenberg: Yes, I'd like to say that our focus is on healthy relationships. That we certainly recognize that marriage is one great example of a healthy relationship. But especially in what we would consider to be distressed communities, there are lots of different models today for what family looks like.

And we focus on skills for empowering people in the area of their relationships recognizing that many of them will translate that into their marriages but also being very aware that there are many different models today for relationships and whether it's a grandfather with his grandson or a grandmother with their daughter that these are skills to empower them.

Nigel Vann: Okay. Erik or Gerry, do you have anything to add to that?

Gerardo Valles: Yes Nigel, let me answer that question. Our answer is that our program has been with the Mayor Involvement Program since 1992. Our executive director belong, I mean believe strongly that this parental programs are very important.

So more than likely the funding will come from Head Start. As a matter of fact we have a team of researchers that are constantly looking for cracks or something that we can do in order to make our community better.

So the answer is that funding from Head Start and we are sure going to keep on doing that.

Nigel Vann: Okay. So Gerry's getting ahead of me there. He's reading the questions that were coming. So somebody had asked what funding that they were planning to use to sustain their program. So thanks for that answer Gerry.

And there's one person who pointed out that on the slide they downloaded were not the slides that were used today. If anyone else had a problem with the slides, if you would just let us know at infor@fatherhood.gov and we'll certainly get you the correct slides.

Erik, let me ask you a question in terms of, you know, you were talking about the difference between father programs and healthy marriage programs. And how lot of fatherhood programs are only working with the fathers.

Would you like to talk a little bit about how you think even in that context, I mean, first of all, let me say it's impossible in the context to if you're just working with a group of dads, can you cover healthy marriage skills? If so, how?

Erik Vecere: Well I mean I think you can. And I mean ultimately, you know, the facilitators have to gage and, you know, build that trust in the relationships within the group. I mean that's certainly key to moving, you know, anybody through the stages of adoption that I'm sure many of us are familiar with, you know.

But I, you know, I think that as I mentioned earlier, I mean you can at least put out there, you know, that there are benefits of marriage for men. I think that, you know, even putting that out there for discussion I think that there are some things in terms of helping them even just to review their marriage model.

You know, why do they feel the way they do about whether marriage is attainable for them or something that they value or that they don't value. And to the earlier question, you know, it kind of ties that in there as well.

Because, you know, this idea of valuing marriage less than, you know, not-at-risk and things like that, I mean I think that was a great point. And I think that's it's not so much, you know, maybe whether or not the value but what did they see modeled. And why, you know, have they made decisions that don't support that.

You know, I think that fitting into some of those kind of things can be very effective and valuable in moving men along that stages of adoption. And again, it's not always too, you know, to force men to get married just for the sake of being married, you know.

But I think that, again, in a fatherhood program typically it is more, it's more of a preventative strategy in that, you know, majority of the fathers that are in these programs, you know, have already been in a situation where their relationship with the mom has deteriorated.

And it can be very difficult based on past relationships to, you know, to communicate that. But if we're starting to think about it in terms of their children and, you know, to help them define, you know, what kind of relationship would you like your children, you know, to aspire to and to work towards.

And, you know, it comes back to some of Seth's comments on the importance of empathy because it can help the fathers see through they eyes of their children while helping to bridge them to the value of marriage. And not just the value of marriage, but providing them skills to, you know, to be that in future relationships and, you know, to set the stage for their children.

So I think that that's key. And the other piece is I mentioned in my first story that I had there a lot of fatherhood programs that are finding it comfortable to do a marriage readiness program for men.

And, you know, it's easy bridge because you're still just working with the men. You're not, you know, talking about anything at that point where you need to have the mom in there. But again, it's preventative.

And it's putting some of these key components or dynamics on the table that can help them in their future relationships. And again, really to, you know, to build that I don't the idea that if there's a commitment between the biological mother and the biological father within a healthy marriage setting, you know, that really should, you know, should still be ideal.

And, you know, and I agree with Seth too that, you know, it's, you know, it's about the healthy relationship. And hopefully that converts into a healthy marriage. But the skills are the skills, you know.

And what takes it to that healthy marriage level is that commitment that look, you know, we're going to work through things. You know, we've committed to each other. And we're recognized legally in society, you know, as being, you know, husband and wife. And, you know, and that's going to be, you know, the context for that relationship.

I think that those are all, you know, key aspects.

Nigel Vann: Great. Yes, and I think we'll see, you know, the fact that the way you started out your presentation with talking about framing it around what's best for the kids, you know.

Let me ask a question to you, Gerry, along those lines. You know, because I think part of the work as I said at the beginning, I think what you do is to raise the awareness of dads in terms of how what they do impacts their kids.

And part of that is how they relate to the mother of the child obviously. So could you just share a little bit and maybe tell the story about one of your participants in terms of how you sort of get that light bulb to go off?

How do you get to that sort of a ha moment, you know, where a dad sees that if I can get on better with my wife, my kids are going to do better?

Gerardo Valles: Well Nigel I think that good co-bonding with the parent will assure that. In the reality, the only one who could tell will be the fathers and we have a lot of success stories on this.

We have letters that have been written to us thanking us. As a matter of fact, the day before yesterday, I submitted to message to Dr. (Enriques) that was left on Mr. (Blanco)'s phone message and which stated the mother blessing him for everything that he had done for the husband.

Because now he's very interested in getting the GED. And he's seen a dramatic change in his wife. And that's why out of the blue they called Mr. (Blanco) and blessing him is something that he's never heard. He was very happy about this.

So I think the success you cannot measure has to be heard from the participants. And we are getting a lot of calls like that.

Nigel Vann: So Seth, what do you think it is that you do that helps dad sort of change the way they're thinking?

Gerardo Valles: The bonding. The staffs that I have when we developed the program, Nigel, we wanted to have ex Head Start parents that would understand our community and the Head Starts that our culture.

All the staff members that we have, have been Head Start parents. I think that has created a bonding with parents because they can relate to them. They know what they're doing and that they lived that.

The staff members lead the instructors. They always tell the parents they're not going to ask them to do anything that they have not done. And I think that's where you start creating the bonding because the presenters talk about their experiences and that they have gone through that too.

I think that that's important. Throughout the week, we've got a judge with a suit and tie. You've seen it. On Saturdays, when we do the classes with the parents, we do not use a tie. We want to be the same as the parent.

I think those little things that we do for the dads help us to create that bonding.

Seth Eisenberg: Can I answer that Nigel?

Nigel Vann: Yes, please do Seth.

Seth Eisenberg: So, first of all what you're saying about authenticity is very much the foundation of this work. We've come up with a list of the qualities that are most important in instructors which is on our website if anybody wants to look at it.

But it begins with being authentic, creating an environment where people can be vulnerable. So whether you're dressed in a suit and tie or jeans or shorts, it's truly having people leading classes that are willing to be real, vulnerable and authentic.

But also to recognize the importance of getting out of the way and letting that once we explain and demonstrate a skill, letting participants do the work with each other. And shifting that paradigm to a

paradigm that says, you know, turning to a third-party for answers or solutions to how do I turn to myself and to the significant people I share my life with to figure out, you know, what makes sense for our lives.

And finally, in terms of engaging men, the most important message is that this is about helping you have your dreams come true. It is I can't imagine finding anybody, really in the world, who won't say that they want to be happy.

That they want to be successful. And being able to show practicality how this is going to help do that. One of the videos that we regularly share is Richard Marriott of the Marriott family talking about how much this, you know, that we all need to learn skills, you know, for algebra and other math or other areas of our life.

And these are skills to help people be successful. So that message has very much resonated with men. It's a very different message than the message that says, do this because it's the right thing to do. It really is saying that but saying it's the right thing to do for you because this is very much in your self-interest in terms of having your own dreams come true.

Nigel Vann: Great, thanks Seth. Yes, I do think that this work is a lot about leading men to those, as I say aha moments, you know, so.

What I'm going to do now, I'm go to Matt to our survey. And while we're starting this, Erik, if there's time after this, I'd like you just to perhaps take 30 seconds to talk about the idea of the weeds and roots.

Erik Vecere: Okay.

Nigel Vann: Okay. So, Matt, if you just could take us through the poll questions?

Matthew Crews: Great. I see most of you have already started to go ahead and vote.

The first question is, I have a better understanding of recent research concerning the value of healthy marriage skills education in their responsible fatherhood programs.

You have five options there or six at the bottom if you do not have an opinion. I'll give you all a minute to vote.

Just about 20 more seconds. All right.

The second question, The advice and suggestions for ways to raise the awareness of fathers concerning the importance of healthy marriage was helpful. Once again, you have five options -- strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree and do not have an opinion. The no vote is at the bottom.

A few more seconds. All right.

The third question is the suggestions of strategies to help fathers embrace communication and conflict resolutions skills were helpful. And just about 20 more seconds to give everybody a chance to vote.

All right. And the last is, in general, I received good information that I can use in my work with fathers. Strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree and no vote.

And while you're all filling that out, I'll give you guys a reminder. If for some reason you did not receive the slides that were sent out this morning for this webinar, feel free to email infor@fatherhood.gov and we will be sure to get you slides from today's presentation.

All right just about 15 seconds to vote. And I will kick everything back to Nigel.

Nigel Vann: Okay well thank you very much Matt. I don't know if it's possible, Matt, but while Erik starts talking now, if you would, could find that slide of his at the end of his presentation on the weeds and roots?

Matthew Crews: Yes, sure. I think everybody's had a chance to vote.

Nigel Vann: So Erik, if you'd just like to go ahead and just, you know, very briefly but share your thoughts about the weeds and the roots. Here's the slide.

You know, Seth mentioned the fact that a lot of his work is planting seeds. I just thought this might be a nice way to close out.

Erik Vecere: Sure. Well this is just a way again, I try to visually and conceptually stress the importance of marriage education in combating many of the issues that frustrate service providers, community leaders and fatherhood programs.

You know, many of the issues that we as a society are exerting energy weed whacking the heck out of are the issues above the ground to no avail. And, you know, as an example, I mean there are some fathers' rights groups that are frustrated about biased courts which is one of the weeds that I just threw up there.

You know, I mean if we can't expect the mother and the father to work together to agree what's in the best interest of their child and work things out, you know, within the context of, you know, a healthy marriage, once it gets into the court system, I mean there are so many things outside of their control.

I mean we put a lot of pressure on a judge to try to figure out all the dynamics that are swirling around, you know, the situation there. And who's in the best, you know, situation to take care of the child, or a primary, or a shared custody, or no custody. All of those things really, you know, put people at a disadvantage.

And unfortunately once something gets into the court system, the courts for the most part, I mean there's a winner and a loser. And not a real good situation to be in, you know, in terms of family dynamics.

So there a lot of root issues right under the surface such as things like domestic violence, and out-of-wedlock births, and marital dissolution, low father involvement. These lead to the weeds.

But there are even deep rooted issues. And you'll see those are kind of the tap roots at the bottom that are around the social norms regarding marriage and the lack of skills regarding marriage.

You can reduce many of the weeds which are choking the fruit of our healthy children to those two roots. And I usually follow up a slide from weeds and roots to also seeds and fruits. And show with some examples of, you know, situations where there are, you know, healthy marriage situations and how the children are, you know, flourishing in those.

With the social norms regarding marriage, I mean Seth brought up a good point about how, you know, some of the older social norms used to be one of the key reasons you got married was to have children.

And within that context, it was, you know, a social norm that really affects the whole way that we define, you know, the purpose of marriage. And now that it has kind of gravitated a little more towards the soul

mate view that we hold today and, you know, it's not even, you know, some of the main reasons are not necessarily to have children.

It's, you know, if that's the case sometimes it's much further down the road now. So those social norms really do kind of affect, you know, not saying good or bad. But, you know, those norms can affect the way that marriage is viewed and how much emphasis that our society puts on marriage and whether or not we see that as the ideal anymore.

Now also the fact that there are people now who have grown up in they're in, you know, maybe second, third, fourth generation of never seeing a healthy marriage model in the home.

And that is really, you know, that's key because we know that, you know, fathers are they're the role model for their sons and the relational model for their daughters. And moms are the other way around.

So if children aren't seeing that model day in and day out in the home and within the context of a healthy marriage then, you know, it just becomes more of a it's kind of an ethereal kind of vague concept that, you know, marriages are nice but maybe not necessary.

And so, you know, that's the one side. And of course, the other side also to what other presenters spoke to today is providing those skills regarding healthy relationships that lead to healthy marriages.

And, you know, looking at it within that context. So that's a quick overview of the weeds and roots.

Nigel Vann: Okay well thank you. Yes, I think it's a good sort of way of trying to capture some of this. And, you know, for me actually I would also put down in the roots there I think, you know, our personal experiences.

So I think what a lot of good fatherhood and healthy marriage programs do and really Seth was talking to this is, you know, it helps you to take a look at the experiences of your own parents and your own grandparents and how that's impacted on you and how that's led to some of our personal weeds, you know.

So let me just close here by reading that quote from Kyle Pruitt again. I think this ties in pretty well. If you remember, I started this day by quoting Kyle Pruitt's definition of a responsible father where he says, "By responsible, I do not simply mean making children behave and act respectful or providing financial security or paying child support. I mean an emotional commitment sufficient to honor one's obligation to sustain the life and soul one helped create".

So what I'm taking from that is that if we can help more men develop that emotional commitment to honor their obligations to sustain the life and soul of their kids that undoes a lot of those weeds and roots the Erik was just talking about.

So my challenge today for everybody is to go out there and help more dads meet those emotional commitments.

So I hope you enjoyed the webinar. We will talk to you again soon. Since this is the last webinar of the calendar year. So the next webinar will be sometime in early 2011.

So I wish everybody a Happy Thanksgiving and have a good day. Thanks.

Matthew Crews: Thank you so much Nigel to each of you and all the presenters and guests.

Male: Thank you.

END