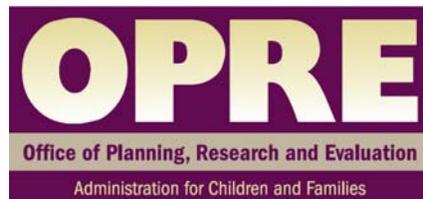


**The Supporting Healthy Marriage Evaluation**

**Early Lessons from the Implementation of a  
Relationship and Marriage Skills Program  
for Low-Income Married Couples**

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## Overview

This report presents early implementation and operational lessons from the Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM) evaluation. Funded by the Administration for Children and Families, SHM uses a rigorous research design to test the effectiveness of a new approach to improving outcomes for low-income children: strengthening the marriages and relationships of their parents as a foundation for family well-being. It also uses implementation research to document and assess how the organizations that were selected to be in the study are implementing the SHM model. The SHM model is for low-income married couples and includes three components: *relationship and marriage education workshops* that teach strategies for managing conflict and effective communication, *supplemental activities* that build on workshop themes and skills through educational and social events, and *family support services* that pair couples with specialized staff who facilitate participation and connect couples with needed services. In the first year of program implementation, SHM providers focused on three main tasks: developing effective marketing and recruitment strategies, keeping couples engaged in the program, and building management structures and systems. Lessons in these three areas from implementation analyses are the focus of this report. Highlights include:

- ***Marketing and recruitment.*** Simply distributing brochures and posters has not been a sufficient recruitment technique for most SHM programs. Programs have found that they also need to partner with local agencies and community organizations, and go into their communities to speak directly with couples.
- ***Engaging couples.*** Anticipating that participating in long-term services would be a challenge for many families, SHM programs have made services as accessible and as attractive as possible. They offer activities during evenings and weekends, provide meals, transportation and child care assistance, emergency funds, and modest incentives. Workshop spaces have been designed to provide comfortable seating for the multi-hour sessions and often look more like living rooms than classrooms. In addition, SHM programs hired male and female staff who are culturally attuned to the populations in their communities, important for engaging both men and women and for engaging couples from diverse cultures.
- ***Managing for performance.*** The SHM research team has held programs accountable by requiring that they achieve particular benchmarks in enrollment and participation in order to remain in the study. Local managers use a management information system to track daily staff efforts, hold one-on-one supervision meetings, and observe staff interacting with couples to directly assess program quality.

Early participation data show encouraging trends. Within six months of enrollment, more than 80 percent of couples attend at least one workshop and go on to complete an average of 20 workshop hours. More than 85 percent of couples attend at least one family support meeting and complete, on average, 4.5 meetings within six months. Over the next several years, the SHM evaluation will continue to examine how these relationship and marriage education programs develop lessons about operating in varied settings with diverse populations over time and, ultimately, will provide information on whether these services make a difference in a range of outcomes for low-income married couples and their children. For more information, visit the SHM Web site at [www.supportinghealthymarriage.org](http://www.supportinghealthymarriage.org).



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The Authors



## Executive Summary

This report presents findings and operational lessons from early implementation analyses in the Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM) evaluation. The SHM evaluation is funded by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; the study will produce impact and implementation findings from SHM demonstrations operated by organizations in 10 locations nationally.<sup>1</sup> Documentation of the recruitment, engagement, and management strategies being used by these organizations is a part of the implementation analyses conducted for the evaluation. The early lessons presented in this report may be of interest and helpful to other program managers who desire to design or implement a new service program, particularly one that is voluntary, that seeks to engage both fathers and mothers, or that expects ongoing participation for an extended period.

### The SHM Program

Motivated by evidence suggesting that children benefit from growing up with two parents who are in a stable, low-conflict relationship, the SHM project uses a rigorous research design to test a new approach to improving outcomes for low-income children by strengthening the marriages and relationships of their parents as a foundation for family well-being. As shown in Box ES.1, the SHM program model is based on three mutually reinforcing components designed for low-income married couples, with the central feature being relationship and marriage education workshops. The workshops are designed to help couples enhance the quality of their relationships through structured curricula that offer strategies for building skills in managing conflict, communicating effectively, and working as a team in parenting their children.

Complementing the core workshops are supplemental activities that include educational and social events that build on lessons presented in the workshops. The third component, family support services, pairs each couple with a specialized staff member who maintains contact with the couple and encourages their participation in the program. Programs strive to keep couples engaged in services for one year, and family support coordinators help facilitate participation by addressing barriers and connecting participants with other needed services.

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<sup>1</sup>SHM is operating in Orlando, Florida; Wichita, Kansas; Bronx, New York; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Bethlehem and Reading, Pennsylvania; El Paso and San Antonio, Texas; and Seattle and Shoreline, Washington. The Pennsylvania and Texas programs offer services in two locations in their states. In the implementation analysis, the locations are discussed separately, as their local conditions and populations vary. In the impact analysis, each of these states will be considered one “site,” and research samples from both locations will be combined.

### Box ES.1

#### The SHM Program Model: Three Mutually Reinforcing Components

- **Relationship and marriage education workshops:** The core SHM service, workshops are conducted with 3 to 20 couples in a group setting, in weekly sessions lasting 2 to 5 hours each, typically over 10 to 15 weeks, for a total of 24 to 30 hours of curriculum.
- **Supplemental activities:** These events build on and complement the workshops, providing couples additional opportunities to learn and practice relationship skills and build social networks.
- **Family support services:** Family support services are designed to facilitate couples' participation in the program and link them to needed services.

## Enrollment and Participation

As of December 31, 2009, SHM programs had met their recruitment goals set for the evaluation, enrolling a total of 6,300 couples into the study.<sup>2</sup> Enrollees in SHM programs are roughly 50 percent Hispanic, 30 percent white non-Hispanic, and 15 percent black/African-American. Almost three-quarters of couples have incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.<sup>3</sup>

Early participation trends demonstrate interest among most enrolled couples for SHM services. More than 80 percent of couples who volunteer for the program attend at least one workshop together in the first six months after enrollment. Couples who attend at least one workshop go on to complete an average of 20 hours of workshops within six months. More than 85 percent of couples meet with their family support coordinators at least once in the first six months, and couples who attend one meeting go on to complete an average of 4.5 meetings in six months.

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<sup>2</sup>Half of the 6,300 couples are enrolled in SHM program services, and half are assigned to a control group that is not enrolled in SHM but can access other services in their communities.

<sup>3</sup>For a family of four, 200 percent of the federal poverty level in 2009 was an annual income of \$44,100 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "2009 Federal Poverty Guidelines," Web site: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/09poverty.shtml>).

## Lessons for Starting Up New Voluntary Programs

SHM program providers put considerable energy into developing and refining marketing and recruitment strategies to generate interest in the program, into creating accessible and relevant services that would encourage participation over the long term, and into building management structures to meet performance benchmarks. In addition to documenting early implementation experiences, the SHM evaluation provides some lessons related to marketing and recruitment, engagement, and management that may be useful to others who are designing or running new and voluntary services, particularly those seeking to engage both fathers and mothers for an extended period.

### **Recruiting Married Couples: Creative Marketing Strategies and Face-to-Face Contact Are Needed**

Low-income married couples are not a group previously served by most of the SHM providers, nor have they been the focus of social services generally. As a result, a good deal of trial and error has been necessary to learn where to recruit couples and which marketing methods work best. Most of the SHM providers began by casting a wide net, then closely evaluating which strategies yielded enrollments. Programs have found the following strategies productive:

- **Create name recognition.** Staff have placed posters, brochures, door hangers, and billboards in low-income communities and have used radio and TV advertising to gain recognition in the service delivery area. To maximize the effectiveness of their media coverage, some programs increased face-to-face outreach in conjunction with radio or TV ads.
- **Market the program directly to low-income couples.** In addition to using media to promote their services, recruitment staff in most programs have found it necessary to go into their communities to speak directly with couples. Effective outreach venues include health fairs, back-to-school events, and food banks.
- **Cultivate partnerships with local social service agencies and with government, community, and faith-based organizations serving or working with low-income couples.** Some partners allow SHM programs to staff information tables in their lobbies during peak business hours or to make presentations at job clubs or parenting classes. Some partners identify interested couples from their caseloads and refer them directly to SHM programs. Maternal and child health programs, pediatric clinics, and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program have been active referral partners.

- **Develop marketing messages that focus on the goals that most couples have for themselves and their family.** Rather than asking couples, “Are you interested in enrolling in free relationship education workshops?” staff ask, “Do you want to learn how to be the best parent you can be?” or “If you could give your marriage a tune-up, what would you most want to improve?” They then share how SHM can help couples accomplish their goals.
- **Actively seek referrals from participants.** Endorsement from current participants is a powerful marketing tool, and word of mouth is a growing recruitment source for many of the SHM programs. Some programs offer small incentives to couples for referring friends who enroll.

### **Engaging Couples: Programs Must Be Couple-Friendly, Relevant, and Easy to Access**

SHM programs need to engage couples over an extended period of time, encouraging them to attend weekly group workshops for up to 15 weeks and to participate in family support and supplemental activities for 12 months. To keep couples coming back week after week, SHM programs strive to be relevant, interesting, and easy to access. Programs address relevance and accessibility in the following ways:

- **Offer activities in convenient locations and during evenings and weekends.** Several programs offer workshops in more than one location in their communities to increase ease of access to program services.
- **Anticipate and address barriers to participation.** All SHM programs provide assistance to offset the costs of transportation and child care, meals before activities to accommodate parents coming directly from work, and limited emergency funds (for needed car repairs, for example).
- **Offer modest incentives.** Programs offer modest incentives like gas or gift cards for completing program activities, and they tie the incentives to specific milestones, such as attending three or more workshops. Some programs offer such incentives as baby supplies and family board games.
- **Create a space that is welcoming for couples and families.** Programs have created workshop spaces that look more like living rooms than classrooms, including painting walls in bright colors, hanging artwork, and providing toys for children.
- **Teach workshops in ways that appeal to different learning styles.** To address a range of learning styles, workshop facilitators use a mix of tech-

niques, such as videos and one-on-one coaching, and emphasize interactive activities over lecturing or reading and writing.

- **Make special efforts to engage and connect with men in addition to women.** Inasmuch as most programs began SHM with little experience in recruiting and engaging men, they have made extra efforts to reach out to them. SHM programs make a point to hire male staff and to make offices welcoming to men by placing sports magazines in waiting areas and hanging pictures showing fathers and children. Some programs offer fathers' groups and special activities for dads and kids.
- **Deliver services in culturally appropriate ways.** SHM programs hire staff who are culturally attuned to the population they serve, including speaking the same language; when possible, they provide workshops in the primary language of the couples participating.

### **Managing for Performance: Structure Systems, and Engage in Continuous Oversight**

SHM programs operate in a performance-based environment and are held accountable for meeting benchmarks related to enrollment, retention in services over time, and participation in the three components of the program. SHM managers have developed structures to monitor performance on these benchmarks and to hold staff accountable in a variety of ways:

- **Use a management information system (MIS) to regularly track progress toward established performance benchmarks.** SHM programs use a Web-based MIS system to track daily staff efforts and performance, especially related to enrollment and participation benchmarks, and to generate detailed reports that help structure team meetings and staff supervision.
- **Hold one-on-one supervision meetings with staff.** Weekly supervision is central to the management approach in many SHM programs. Supervisors also review the work of family support coordinators, family by family, to ensure that staff attempt to provide SHM services to all enrolled couples, not just to those who attend regularly.
- **Observe staff interacting with couples.** By regularly observing program activities, supervisors directly assess whether the content and the quality of services conform to expectations. Through one-on-one supervision meetings, they provide specific feedback to staff about their strengths and areas that can be improved.

In addition to the day-to-day monitoring by program supervisors, the SHM research team tracks program-level performance using the MIS. Each program's continuation in the study is contingent on performance. Frequent technical assistance is provided by SHM research team representatives through site visits, phone calls, and all-program conferences. In addition, the SHM team meets regularly with program managers to review progress, identify areas that are working well and those that need attention, and develop plans for improvement.

## **Summary**

The implementation experience to date from the 10 SHM programs indicates that — with creativity, diligence, and monitoring — it is possible to introduce a new voluntary relationship and marriage skills program, to identify low-income married couples who are interested in enrolling, and to keep most couples engaged in services for several months. Over the next several years, the SHM evaluation will continue to examine questions about how these programs are developing. Future reports will provide additional documentation about operating relationship skills programs in varied settings with diverse populations and, ultimately, will provide findings on whether these services improve outcomes on a range of measures for low-income married couples and their children. For further information, visit the SHM Web site at [www.supportinghealthymarriage.org](http://www.supportinghealthymarriage.org).

## Chapter 1

# Introduction to the Supporting Healthy Marriage Evaluation

This report is the first in a series to be produced over the next few years from the Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM) evaluation, a multisite study of marriage education programs designed for low-income married couples. The evaluation will shed light on the effectiveness of a relatively new approach to supporting families: voluntary skills-based workshops and related services aimed at improving children’s well-being by strengthening the relationships and marriages of low-income parents. With a rigorous random assignment research design for measuring program effects on couples and their children, and an implementation study of what works in program operations, the SHM evaluation is designed to contribute to the base of scientific evidence about these programs. Led by MDRC, the SHM study team includes a number of partners: Abt Associates, Child Trends, Optimal Solutions Group, Public Strategies, Inc., and a range of academic experts in the fields of marriage and the family.<sup>1</sup>

This initial report describes and presents lessons from the early implementation experiences of 10 organizations around the country as they began this new program.<sup>2</sup> It focuses in particular on two goals for SHM programs in their early stages of implementation: recruiting and enrolling couples in the program and encouraging enrollees to participate consistently in the core relationship skills curriculum and other services. As SHM service providers work to meet benchmarks for enrollment and ongoing engagement, they have used management strategies to track program progress, so that approaches that work well can be adopted systematically and those that do not work well can be revised. To date, each program has enrolled several hundred couples into this service despite its relative unfamiliarity in the community, and most couples have participated steadily over the first six months of the program.

The strategies that SHM program operators are using to recruit and work with mothers and fathers are applicable to a range of programs, particularly those whose goals include

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<sup>1</sup>The authors are indebted to numerous academic scholars for advice at various stages of the project. In particular, Carolyn Pape Cowan, Philip Cowan, and Thomas Bradbury have been integral members of the research team over time.

<sup>2</sup>SHM is operating in Orlando, Florida; Wichita, Kansas; Bronx, New York; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Bethlehem and Reading, Pennsylvania; El Paso and San Antonio, Texas; and Seattle and Shoreline, Washington. The Pennsylvania and Texas programs offer services in two locations in their states. In the implementation analysis, the locations are discussed separately, as their local conditions and populations vary. In the impact analysis, each of these states will be considered one “site,” and research samples from both locations will be combined.

facilitating behavior change and on building participants' skills over several weeks, months, or years. The operational lessons described in this report can be applied most directly to program models that seek to engage fathers as well as mothers in services and to models that deliver information to participants in group settings.

Interest in identifying effective services to strengthen families has grown in recent years, in part because of increasing socioeconomic inequality in children's likelihood of living with both of their parents. Since 1960, Americans have chosen to marry later in adulthood, and more of their marriages have ended in separation or divorce. Low-income individuals have become increasingly likely to have children before marrying, and, for those who marry, dissolution rates have remained very high while declining among better-off couples.<sup>3</sup> As a result, in 2000, 43 percent of mothers in the bottom quarter of the educational distribution were unmarried, compared with 7 percent of mothers in the top 75 percent of the educational distribution.<sup>4</sup> This disparity is of concern to policymakers and program officials, given evidence that growing up in a two-parent, low-conflict family is associated with better developmental outcomes for children.<sup>5</sup>

In response to these trends, when the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program was established in 1996, one of its four goals was to "encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families."<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, Congress authorized \$150 million for healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood activities within the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA), which reauthorized the TANF program, and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has supported grants to increase access to relationship and marriage education among its service populations. Grants have been awarded to a range of state, local, and community-based service providers to offer voluntary programs to individuals and couples based on teaching the skills and knowledge shown in research studies to be associated with stable, healthy relationships and marriages.

These healthy marriage grant-funded programs are voluntary preventive services that typically consist of a structured curriculum taught in a group workshop by one or two facilitators. While earlier evaluations of such services found promising evidence of program effects (described in more detail below), curricula had historically been developed for use with middle-income engaged or married couples, and services were provided on a fee-for-service basis. Over time, the materials have been adapted for use with other groups — such as unmarried parents, youth, and single adults — with special attention to lower-income groups. Many of the ACF

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<sup>3</sup>Ellwood and Jencks (2004); Martin (2006); Raley and Bumpass (2003).

<sup>4</sup>Cherlin (2005).

<sup>5</sup>McLanahan and Sandefur (1994); Amato (2005); Ribar (2004).

<sup>6</sup>TANF legislation, Part A, Section 401(a)(4).

grant programs focus on low-income families in particular, because although such families are disproportionately affected by family breakup, they have previously had limited access to services that could help strengthen their relationships and marriages.

ACF has also funded research and evaluations to assess the effectiveness of these services with disadvantaged populations, including two rigorous studies currently under way. SHM is evaluating the effects of services for low-income married couples, and the Building Strong Families evaluation is testing the effectiveness of services to romantically involved unmarried parents of newborns. A separate evaluation will assess community-level effects of programs and services targeting different populations within a community.

## **Building on Prior Research<sup>7</sup>**

The SHM program model and evaluation are designed to add important new scientific evidence to the existing body of random assignment studies about marriage education programs. Marriage education was developed as a preventive approach, in contrast to marital therapy, which has historically worked with couples to try to repair relationships that are already in distress. Concerned that the success of marital therapy is constrained by couples' tendency to seek help only after their relationships have deteriorated substantially, psychologists began to investigate a more preventive educational approach to strengthening relationships.<sup>8</sup> The earliest programs focused on structured approaches to communication and conflict resolution, with later programs encouraging couples to consider the role in relationships of their own expectations and attitudes, empathy, and emotions; the meaning of recurrent conflicts; and the importance of nurturing positive aspects of the relationship. Meta-analyses conducted over the past two decades suggest that these preventive psychoeducationally oriented programs can produce moderate positive effects on relationship satisfaction and communication.<sup>9</sup> However, even those studies that used random assignment were limited in that they involved predominantly white, middle-class couples; many had small samples and suffered from attrition of study members; and most measured a limited set of outcomes, such as marital satisfaction, rather than longer-term marital stability or outcomes for children.<sup>10</sup> Those studies that examined outcomes for more than six months typically reported reduced impacts over time.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>This chapter draws on Knox and Fein (2009).

<sup>8</sup>Bradbury, Johnson, Lawrence, and Rogge (1998); Christensen (1999).

<sup>9</sup>Butler and Wampler (1999); Carroll and Doherty (2003); Giblin, Sprenkle, and Sheehan (1985); Hawkins, Blanchard, and Fawcett (2007); Reardon-Anderson, Stagner, Macomber, and Murray (2005).

<sup>10</sup>Carroll and Doherty (2003); Reardon-Anderson, Stagner, Macomber, and Murray (2005).

<sup>11</sup>Halford, Markman, Kline, and Stanley (2003); Silliman et al. (2002); Reardon-Anderson, Stagner, Macomber, and Murray (2005).

Recently published random assignment studies have begun to address the limitations of these earlier studies, by seeking to increase the likelihood of long-term benefits (by designing programs to last for several months) and by conducting studies with somewhat larger samples, more careful designs, longer follow-up, and broader outcomes of interest, such as parenting and children's well-being. Programs that have focused on supporting marital relationships during the transition to new parenthood have found a range of positive effects, including effects on couples' relationship quality (but not stability), parenting, co-parenting, father-infant attachment, and infants' language and emotional development.<sup>12</sup> One study targeting parents with children who were entering school reported improved adaptation to high school for children 10 years after the intervention.<sup>13</sup> The recent Supporting Fathers' Involvement study serving primarily low-income Hispanic couples has produced improvements in relationship satisfaction for each spouse and in fathers' engagement in parenting, as well as reductions in parenting stress for each spouse and in children's problem behavior as reported by parents.<sup>14</sup>

Building on this prior evidence, SHM is designed as a large-scale, multisite, independent evaluation of a program model designed specifically to help low-income married couples and their children achieve long-term benefits. It uses the most rigorous research methods to examine outcomes of critical importance to policymakers: couples' long-term relationship quality and stability and outcomes for children. Moreover, because SHM programs are being operated by 10 organizations in communities across the country, the evaluation will provide practical operational insights about running these programs in a variety of real-world settings. If publicly funded interventions like SHM can effectively promote marital quality and stability for low-income families, they may be able to contribute to more positive prospects for children.

## Topics Addressed in This Report

This report provides the first implementation findings from the SHM study about the challenges and successes experienced by local organizations as they developed programs in this new arena. While participation in marriage education programs for a fee is fairly common among middle-class couples, free relationship skills programs are not available in most low-income communities. Thus, the extent to which low-income married couples would volunteer and participate in such programs was largely unknown.

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<sup>12</sup>Cowan and Cowan (1992); Shapiro and Gottman (2005).

<sup>13</sup>Cowan and Cowan (2006).

<sup>14</sup>Cowan et al. (2008).

## **Couple Enrollment**

An open question at the start of the project was: Will low-income married couples see SHM services as valuable and enroll in them?

Recent interviews with low-income couples in different states suggest that there is an interest, at least in theory, in relationship and marriage education services. In statewide surveys in Florida, Oklahoma, and Texas, adults have expressed interest in relationship and marriage education programs.<sup>15</sup> In ethnographic research, low-income couples describe their commitment to marriage for life, as well as considerable fear about the high rates of separation and divorce that they have witnessed in their communities.<sup>16</sup> A critical question for SHM and similar education programs is whether low-income couples will, indeed, enroll when these services are offered free of charge.

## **Ongoing Participation**

Another question was: If low-income couples do enroll in SHM programs, will they continue to attend over the yearlong program period, or will competing priorities make it difficult to participate over time?

Most voluntary programs for parents find that maintaining steady attendance is challenging, given all the work and family responsibilities that compete for parents' time. In anticipation of this challenge, SHM programs employ a number of design elements and operational practices that are aimed at actively encouraging consistent participation.

Clearly, if local programs find that couples are either not interested in the services they are offering or not able to participate with any consistency, the programs will have little chance of producing benefits for families. But, at least in this early phase of implementation, SHM programs are meeting the two initial operational challenges: enrolling couples in this new type of program and engaging them in services over time.

As detailed throughout the report, SHM providers are achieving these goals by using strategies like those outlined below that other program operators are likely to find useful as they launch or refine innovative programs for couples, fathers, mothers, or families:

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<sup>15</sup>Karney, Garvan, and Thomas (2003); Johnson et al. (2002); Harris et al. (2008).

<sup>16</sup>Waller (1996); Edin and Kefalas (2005).

- Developing effective recruitment messages about the benefits of their program for parents and their children
- Experimenting with a variety of recruitment sources and methods
- Designing programs to remove as many obstacles to participation as possible
- Striving to offer high-quality services that couples value from their first encounter with program staff
- Operationalizing performance benchmarks from programwide indicators down to the level of individual supervision of staff members

## The SHM Program Model

Since past marriage education programs have typically been provided to middle-income couples rather than lower-income couples, an initial task of the SHM team was to examine prior research and existing marriage education curricula to develop a program model that would meet the needs of a low-income target population. The team consulted extensively with scholars and practitioners who had expertise in a number of fields, including basic research on family and couple relationships; existing interventions for couples, fathers, and families; and effective operation of programs for low-income families. This process led to four principles that guided program development:

- **Enhancing one’s marital relationship often requires some change in behavior, habits, or assumptions.** For most people, incorporating these changes into daily life is likely to take active engagement over time. This implies that working with couples over several months may help them to derive maximum benefit from the program.
- **Relative to middle-class couples, low-income couples are likely to face deeper relationship stressors, such as poverty, underemployment, housing issues, depression, and substance abuse.** Programs for low-income couples may be able to mitigate these stressors by leveraging outside services, helping couples understand how chronic challenges can affect relationships, providing couples with strategies for coping with stress, and providing supports to reduce barriers to program participation that may be linked to these stressors.
- **SHM programs are likely to be most effective in strengthening marital relationships if they work with the couple as a unit, unlike many existing programs that work with mothers or fathers only.**

- **Participants in voluntary preventive programs may respond well to a strength-based approach that helps them to recognize assets in their relationship and to develop from that foundation rather than focusing services primarily on problems.**<sup>17</sup>

These principles led to a program model that includes three mutually reinforcing components offered over a 12-month period. Figure 1.1 provides an overview of these components, the objectives of each, and the longer-term outcomes that are the subject of a future impact study. As shown in the figure, the SHM program includes (1) a series of relationship and marriage education workshops lasting three to five months; (2) individual family support staff who actively encourage participation over time, coach couples on new skills, and provide referrals to other services in the community; and (3) supplemental activities designed to engage couples with program staff and other couples for the full program year. This program model is described more fully below, and the individual approaches of each local SHM program are explained in Chapters 2 and 3.

### **Eligibility and Enrollment**

Couples first hear about their local SHM program in a variety of ways. Some pick up a brochure for the program at a local organization and contact the program themselves; others are recruited directly by program staff who visit community venues or by other couples who have participated. When a couple first inquires about SHM, a staff member describes the program and invites the couple to make an appointment to hear more about it, unless it is apparent that they do not meet basic eligibility criteria. These include whether the two spouses:

- Are both interested in participating
- Are both age 18 or older
- Are currently married
- Are parents of a child under the age of 18 who lives in their home at least half the time<sup>18</sup>
- Are both able to understand one of the languages in which the local program is offering SHM services (English and, in some local programs, Spanish)
- Have no indication of domestic violence in the relationship

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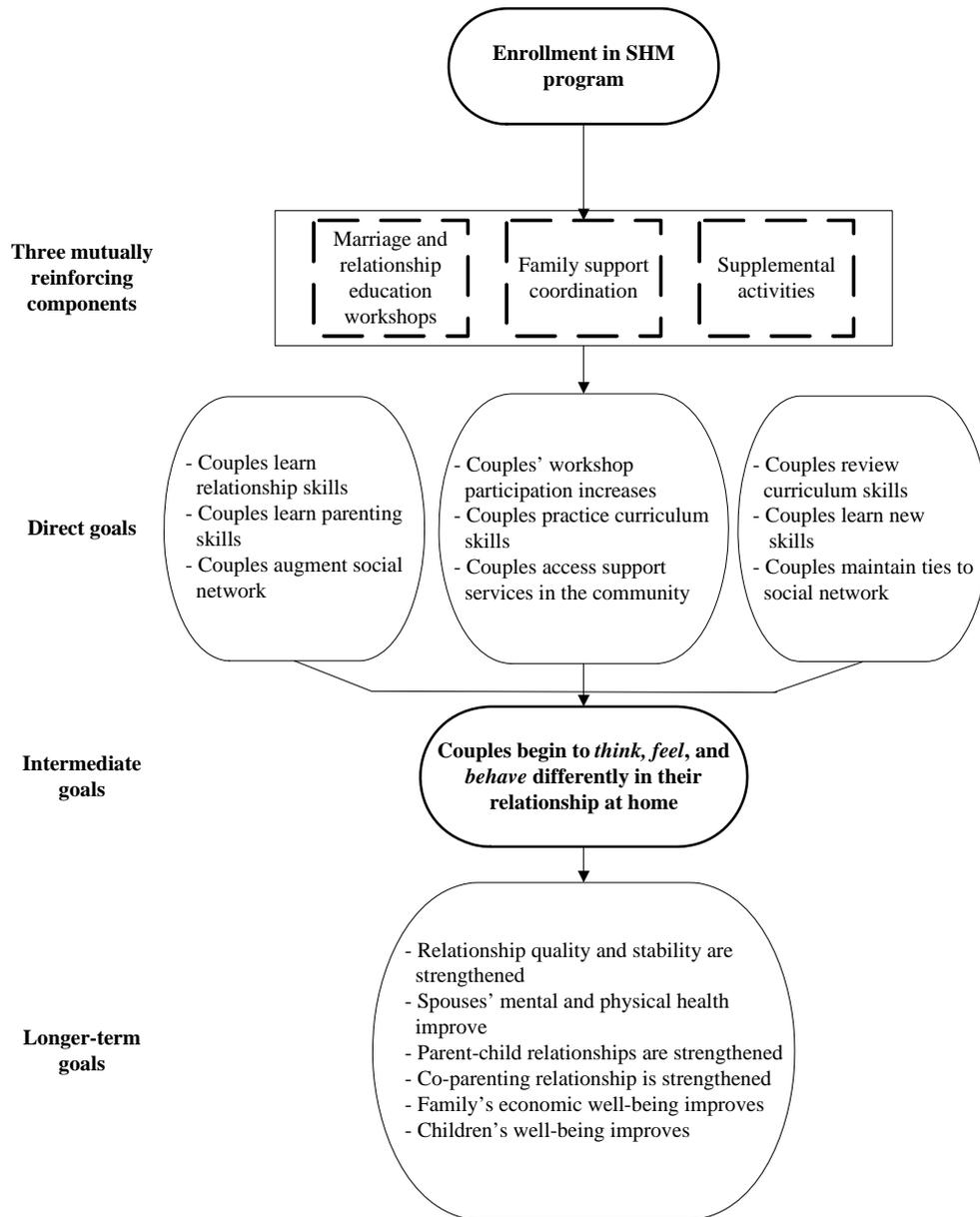
<sup>17</sup>Benard (2006).

<sup>18</sup>This can be a biological or adopted child of either parent, or the couple can be expecting their first child.

# The Supporting Healthy Marriage Evaluation

Figure 1.1

SHM Program Flow and Expected Changes for Families Over Time



Since the health and safety of participants are key concerns, this last criterion has been given particularly careful attention during program development and operations. The SHM model is not designed to resolve domestic violence, so couples facing these issues will be most appropriately served by a local domestic violence agency. Therefore, each SHM program works collaboratively with local domestic violence agencies to develop a domestic violence screening tool and response protocol. The screening tool is administered during enrollment, and the protocol directs staff in how to respond if domestic violence is observed or disclosed.

SHM program operators target their recruitment efforts toward married couples with family income below \$50,000 — slightly above 200 percent of the poverty line for a family of four.<sup>19</sup> This income guideline was chosen so that enrollees would be two-parent families of modest means, with the goal of preventing dissolution that can lead to deeper poverty.<sup>20</sup>

At the enrollment appointment, couples are screened for eligibility, provide some initial information about themselves, and learn more about the program and the study. The staff explain to them that SHM is currently available only as part of a study and, if they are eligible, that they will be assigned at random to either a group that is enrolled in SHM (the “program group”) or a group that will not be enrolled in SHM but may participate in any other services in the community (the “control group”). Couples are also informed that whether they are assigned to the program group or the control group, if they agree to enter the study, researchers will contact them in the future to learn about how they and their children are doing.<sup>21</sup>

### **Relationship and Marriage Education Workshops**

As soon as possible after a couple is enrolled into the program group, the SHM program assigns them to the weekly relationship and marriage education workshop that is the core of the program. These workshops use structured curricula with core materials that have been field-tested over many years and that recently have been adapted for low-income couples. All are designed to reinforce skills and teach concepts that basic research has found

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<sup>19</sup>The targeted income cutoff for two programs located in the Seattle metropolitan area is \$60,000, to account for the high cost of living in that region.

<sup>20</sup>Programs typically target these families by directing outreach efforts to neighborhoods where low-income couples live and by working with referral partners that serve low-income families. Most programs also emphasize to individual couples who inquire about SHM that the program is designed for those with less than \$50,000 income, but couples are not required to provide proof of income in order to enroll.

<sup>21</sup>In most sites, couples leave the enrollment appointment knowing whether they have been randomly assigned to the program group or to the control group; otherwise, they learn their assignment within a few days. Both program and control group members are given \$25 gift cards when they leave the enrollment interview, to reimburse them for the time that they spend providing research information at enrollment. Control group members are provided with a list of resources that are available in the community.

to be important in couple relationships, as well as to facilitate new insights into the couple's own relationship. (See Box 1.1.)

As shown in Figure 1.2, the typical couple starts a workshop about five weeks after enrolling in the SHM program and ends it about three and half months later. The average workshop includes 10 to 12 couples, although the size can vary from as few as 3 couples to as many as 15 or 20. After starting a workshop series, a couple is encouraged by program staff to continue in the same series; staying with the same group of couples over time is particularly important when the program's curriculum includes a significant amount of group discussion and interaction. As couples grow comfortable sharing with one another, peer-to-peer learning is expected to augment input from the facilitators, as well as to help couples build and expand their social networks.

### **Supplemental Relationship and Marriage Education Activities**

Supplemental activities are educational and social events that complement the core workshops. These activities are designed to keep couples engaged with the program for the full year to reinforce relationship skills, to continue providing links to community resources, and to provide a venue for couples to solidify their support networks of married couples from the program. Supplemental activities generally fall into one of four categories:

- **Booster sessions** that are similar in format to the program's core workshops and use core curriculum concepts but introduce new relationship-related material. Examples include strengthening relationships in step-families, co-parenting, and using new communication skills to discuss the balance between work and family.
- **Educational presentations** that provide resource information to help couples address relationship stressors and/or learn new skills. Examples include sessions on financial planning, budgeting, accessing the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and child development and baby care workshops.
- **Curriculum refreshers** that are integrated with social activities. One example is a "date night" series in which couples come to the program for a short session on a relationship topic led by staff, followed by couples' going out on a date, to reinforce the importance of spending time together as a couple.
- **Programwide events** for couples or families that are more social than educational, such as a potluck dinner or a movie night for the whole family, aimed at helping couples build positive social networks through connections with the other couples, families, and program staff.

## Box 1.1

### Marriage Education Curricula Used in Local SHM Programs

Four curricula are used by local SHM programs. A description of each curriculum is included in Appendix A.\*

- *Within Our Reach* (adapted from the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program, or PREP) is the curriculum used by the SHM programs in Bethlehem, El Paso, Reading, San Antonio, and Wichita. See Stanley and Markman (2008).
- *For Our Future, For Our Family* (adapted from Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills, or PAIRS) is the curriculum used by the SHM program in Orlando. See Gordon, DeMaria, Haggerty, and Hayes (2007).
- *Loving Couples, Loving Children* (adapted from Bringing Baby Home) is the curriculum used in the Bronx and Shoreline SHM programs. See Loving Couples Loving Children, Inc. (2009).
- *Becoming Parents Program* (based on PREP and adapted from an earlier version of Becoming Parents) is the curriculum used by SHM providers in Oklahoma City and Seattle. See Jordan, Stanley, and Markman (1999).

All these curricula include a common set of overarching topics that are relevant to low-income married couples, such as:

- Understanding marriage (realistic expectations about marriage, long-term commitment, trust)
- Managing conflict (communication, conflict resolution, problem solving)
- Promoting positive connections between spouses (emotional connection, friendship, intimacy)
- Strengthening relationships beyond the couple (support networks, extended family)
- Coping with circumstances outside the couple's relationship (such as understanding how individual upbringing affects relationships or addressing joint challenges, such as financial stress)
- Parenting (child development, discipline, parenting as a team)

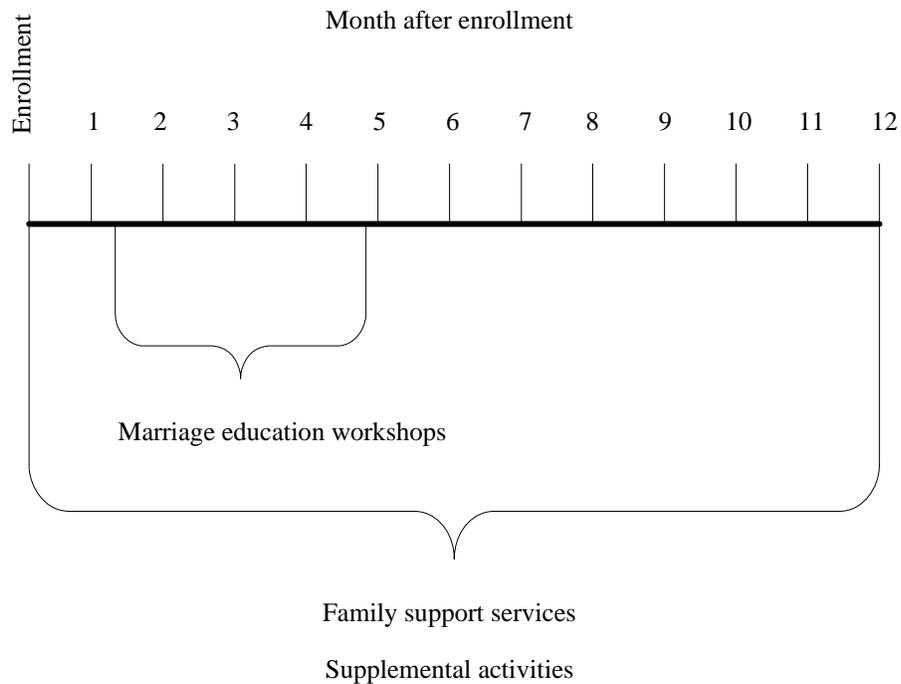
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\*For more information on how curricula were selected and adapted, see Knox and Fein (2009).

## The Supporting Healthy Marriage Evaluation

Figure 1.2

### Services Offered for One Year to SHM Couples



Most SHM programs offer supplemental activities a few times per month on week-nights or weekends. Program managers are strategic in how they time these services. Some programs invite couples to supplemental activities early on, while they are waiting for their group workshop to start, to help maintain their initial interest in the program. Other programs focus on couples who have already finished their workshops so that the two components do not compete for couples' time. Still other programs invite couples to begin these activities during their core group workshop to create a bridge between the workshop and the supplemental activities, which are meant to last for the remainder of their program year.

## **Family Support Services**

This component of the SHM program is provided by family support coordinators who work one-on-one with individual couples, serving as their primary contact. Family support coordinators perform three basic functions:

- Promote engagement and participation in the program for 12 months by maintaining steady contact with couples and by administering participation supports (such as transportation or child care reimbursement)
- Link couples to outside services that go beyond the program’s offerings, such as mental health counseling or employment services, to mitigate challenges faced by couples
- Reinforce the skills and principles of the core workshops over time, through regular meetings with individual couples

The goal is for the family support coordinators to develop a relationship with each couple and for the couple to rely on their coordinator as a coach who helps them apply new skills, navigate challenges, and celebrate successes. Family support coordinators are intended to be the “glue” that keeps couples connected to the program.

## **Participation Supports**

To facilitate participation, local SHM programs provide a variety of concrete supports. These include child care assistance (either on-site care or reimbursement for care arranged by the parents); reimbursement of transportation expenses to the program; and emergency assistance payments for couples whose participation is likely to be undermined by a short-term financial problem (such as a car repair). Programs also provide modest incentives, such as gift cards or small items for the family, to encourage participation in group workshops and, somewhat less often, in other components. Programs typically provide a light meal before each group workshop, as many participants come to the program straight from work.

## **The SHM Research Design**

The SHM research agenda includes an implementation study and a random assignment impact study. The *implementation study* is documenting how SHM operates in each local program, providing a basis for interpreting program impacts as well as for operational advice to organizations that may want to operate SHM or other similar program models for families in the future. The *random assignment impact study* will examine the effects of the program on couples and their children. Random assignment is widely considered the most rigorous method for

estimating the impact of an intervention on study participants. The process ensures that when couples enter the study there are no systematic differences in characteristics, measured or unmeasured, between couples who are in the program group and couples who are in the control group. Thus, any differences between them that emerge after random assignment — for example, in relationship quality or stability — can be attributed to the SHM program.

By comparing outcomes for the program group and the control group, the SHM study will answer the following questions:

- What are the effects of SHM on low-income married couples, on each of the parents, and on their children?
- Who benefits the most and the least from this model of relationship and marriage education?
- In which local programs was SHM effective? What are some possible reasons that SHM works better in some programs than others?

### **The Implications of Implementing SHM Programs Within a Research Demonstration**

As local SHM staff develop this new program, they face operational challenges that are common to many voluntary programs, such as deciding what messages to use when introducing the program to couples and how to encourage consistent participation across all the program components. Additionally, being part of a random assignment research study has implications for how local programs are expected to manage the program. As mentioned above, local SHM programs face two central objectives, which are heightened because of the research context:

- **Enrollment of a substantial number of couples.** Each local program operator is striving to enroll about 800 couples over the course of approximately two years — 400 who would receive program services and 400 who would be in the control group. This is a considerable number of couples to recruit and to serve in a brand-new program.
- **Participation and engagement over time.** Local SHM programs are expected to achieve high participation rates and consistent engagement over an extended period of time, so that the study can come as close as possible to testing the efficacy of the SHM program model for those who participate in the full program.

In short, to put the study in a position to answer its central research questions, the local programs were expected to create well-managed, high-performing programs, in a limited time

frame. Along with these challenges of working in a research context have come resources and technical assistance at levels that are not usually available to local programs. These include:

- **Federal funding** of the programs.<sup>22</sup> Local SHM programs receive federal funding to run their programs through subcontracts with MDRC, which is, in turn, under contract to the Administration for Children and Families. Several programs have additional funding from other federal or state sources, which supplements the funding received through the SHM project itself.
- A common **management information system** that was developed centrally by the SHM project team. The system is used by 9 of the 10 programs to manage couples' progress through the program and to track enrollment, participation rates of couples, and other performance benchmarks on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis.
- Intensive, continual **technical assistance from the SHM project team**. Technical assistance is aimed at helping each local program institute a high-performance environment, including strong management, close supervision, and continuous learning by staff at all levels. A program operations liaison from the SHM team is assigned to each local program and maintains close contact with the program, conducts regular site visits, monitors progress toward program benchmarks, and advises staff on program operations.
- Most programs receive regular **technical assistance from the developers of the core curriculum**, such as individual feedback to workshop facilitators based on audiotapes or videotapes of selected workshops, and visits to the program to reinforce workshop facilitation methods.

The highly structured context and resources with which these 10 local SHM programs have been launched are relevant to the interpretation of this and later reports in the Supporting Healthy Marriage evaluation. In the absence of well-structured approaches to program management or similar resources, for example, future program operators might take longer to achieve full implementation or might face more difficulties achieving the levels of participation that were achieved by these SHM programs. Nevertheless, the approaches and strategies that these programs employ are applicable to a wide range of voluntary programs; they are not unique to research demonstration projects. Many programs can benefit, for example, from using performance benchmarks regularly as a program management tool, and service providers

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<sup>22</sup>Future reports will document program costs, including both federal funds and additional funding from other sources.

operating voluntary programs often need to develop innovative, structured strategies to recruit participants or to keep them actively engaged over an extended time.

## **The Organization of This Report**

With the foregoing introduction to the SHM program model and study as a foundation, the remainder of this report provides an initial look at how local SHM programs are operating.

- Chapter 2 describes the organizations that are operating SHM, local variations in how the program has been structured within the parameters of the SHM model, and characteristics of the couples who have enrolled. Appendix B provides a detailed profile of each local SHM program.
- Chapter 3 highlights the specific operational strategies that local SHM programs are using to manage the challenges that were central to launching this new program model — particularly, recruiting a new target population and engaging them in a program consistently over time.
- Chapter 4 describes the performance of the local SHM programs to date, focusing on the first six months of participation in the program for a group of early enrollees.

The report describes the process of launching a new model for services in a variety of different programmatic contexts, from a university to a faith-based community organization, from organizations serving expectant parents to those serving Hispanic families with children of all ages. Regardless of the specific context, local program managers have shared the common experience of working closely with their staff to achieve well-specified recruitment and participation goals. Hopefully, organizations that launch new program models for low-income families in the future can begin that process one step closer to achieving their own specific goals by drawing on operational experiences of these local SHM innovators. As reported in Chapter 4, early trends indicate that these programs have succeeded in finding a substantial number of couples who are interested in relationship skills services. Moreover, the vast majority of couples who enroll do participate in the workshops and in family support services during the first six months of follow-up. These are the initial steps that the local programs needed to accomplish if they are to succeed in improving outcomes for couples and their children. Later reports will examine in more detail how the different components of the program were implemented in different local programs; how couples experienced the full 12 months of the program; and, ultimately, the effects of the program on outcomes for couples and their children.

## Chapter 2

# SHM Program Operators: Characteristics and Variation

Chapter 1 notes that the Supporting Healthy Marriage program model (Figure 1.1) is quite structured and that the SHM programs share many similarities in operational approaches and strategies. Yet there are a number of variations in local conditions that have the potential to shape how the program is implemented. Among the ten SHM program operators, for example, two programs operate within faith-based institutions, while five others operate within multi-service, community-based organizations. One of the ten programs offers services entirely in Spanish, while five others offer services in both English and Spanish. Two programs target expectant parents, while the other eight are inclusive of married couples with children of any age. The distinct characteristics of each program may be important in understanding the different ways in which SHM services are delivered over time, and they are also likely to lead to differences in couples' experiences in and responses to the program.

This chapter introduces the 10 SHM programs and highlights variations in the characteristics of these programs and the populations they serve. Appendix B provides detailed profiles of each local program, expanding on the highlights included in this chapter.

## Selecting Program Operators and Planning for SHM Operations

With the goal of learning whether relationship and marriage education programs that operate in diverse settings across the country are effective, SHM program operators were selected based on several criteria:

- Experience with relationship and marriage education, marital or family counseling, or providing services to low-income families
- Organizational capacity to manage and operate the program
- Ability to recruit 800 low-income married couples in the SHM target population and to serve 400 of them
- Interest in operating a demonstration program using the SHM program model and willingness to participate in a random assignment evaluation

Table 2.1 lists the eight sites and ten host agencies that were selected to operate SHM programs and gives their location, program name, and pilot and evaluation start dates.<sup>1</sup> Each agency completed a planning phase and roughly six months of pilot operations before formally becoming a part of the SHM evaluation. As programs demonstrated their capacity to meet the recruitment demands and fully operate the SHM components described in Chapter 1, they advanced into the post-pilot evaluation phase, during which they began to operate programs at full scale.

## **Settings and Institutional Experiences of Program Operators**

The host agencies housing the 10 local SHM programs represent a variety of institutional *settings* and bring with them a wide range of programmatic *experience*. Table 2.2 summarizes how programs vary on these two dimensions. Each of the four institutional settings — community nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations, a hospital, and a university — is described below.

### **Community-Based, Nonprofit Organizations**

Six host agencies are nonprofit organizations that added SHM to a menu of existing programs and services. Bethlehem, Shoreline, El Paso, and San Antonio operate within non-faith-based, community-based service agencies. The Wichita program operates within a faith-based organization, and the Reading program has a faith-based organization as one of its two host agencies.

### **For-Profit Organizations with Relationship and Marriage Education as the Primary Service**

Two of the ten SHM host agencies are for-profit organizations whose relationship and marriage education program is the primary service offered to participants. The Oklahoma City program is housed within Public Strategies, Inc., a for-profit public relations firm that manages the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative and was already operating a relationship education program as part of the Building Strong Families (BSF) study. Becoming Parents Program, Inc. — the host agency for the Seattle program — had delivered relationship and marriage education

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<sup>1</sup>The Pennsylvania and Texas programs offer services in two locations in their state, each recruiting half the sample and serving half the number of participants as the other six programs. For impact research purposes, each state is considered as one “site,” and research samples from both locations will be combined. For implementation research purposes, however, the programs are discussed as separate locations because their local conditions and populations vary.

## The Supporting Healthy Marriage Evaluation

### Table 2.1

#### Local SHM Program Operators

Location	Host Agency	Program Name	Pilot Start Date	Evaluation Start Date
Orlando, FL	University of Central Florida (UCF)	Together Project	September 2007	February 2008
Wichita, KS	Catholic Charities	Marriage for Keeps	June 2007	October 2007
Bronx, NY	University Behavioral Associates (UBA)	UBA Supporting Healthy Marriage	September 2007	March 2008
Oklahoma City, OK	Public Strategies, Inc.	Family Expectations	January 2007	February 2007
Pennsylvania <sup>a</sup>	Community Prevention Partnership of Berks County			
Bethlehem	Family Answers	Strong Families	August 2007	June 2008
Reading	Community Prevention Partnership of Berks County/Reading-Berks Conference of Churches	Strong Families	August 2007	April 2008
Texas <sup>a</sup>	Texas Department of Health and Human Services			
El Paso	El Paso Center for Children	Healthy Opportunities for Marriage Enrichment	June 2007	October 2007
San Antonio	Family Service Association	Healthy Opportunities for Marriage Enrichment	June 2007	October 2007
Seattle, WA	Becoming Parents Program, Inc.	Becoming Parents Program	September 2007	June 2008
Shoreline, WA	Center for Human Services (CHS)	Loving Families	August 2007	March 2008

NOTE: <sup>a</sup>The Pennsylvania and Texas programs offer services in two locations, each recruiting and serving half the research sample for that "site."

**The Supporting Healthy Marriage Evaluation**

**Table 2.2**

**Characteristics of Host Agencies**

Agency Setting and Experience	Bronx	Orlando	Wichita	Oklahoma City	Pennsylvania		Seattle	Shoreline	Texas	
					Bethlehem	Reading			El Paso	San Antonio
Institutional setting										
For profit with marriage education as primary service				✓				✓		
Community-based nonprofit										
Multi-service, non-faith-based						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Multi-service, faith-based			✓				✓ <sup>a</sup>			
Hospital	✓									
University		✓								
Programmatic experience										
Marriage education		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
Marital or family counseling	✓	✓	✓					✓		✓
Other services to low-income families	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

NOTE: <sup>a</sup>In the Reading SHM program, the workshop component is primarily provided by the Reading-Berks Conference of Churches, a faith-based organization, while the intake and family support components are primarily provided by the Community Prevention Partnership of Berks County, which is not faith-based.

services prior to SHM, primarily as fee-for-service workshops for expectant parents and as part of an evaluation grant from the National Institutes of Health.

### **A Hospital**

The Bronx location is the only SHM program that is directly affiliated with a hospital. The main host agency for the program, University Behavioral Associates is a behavioral health center that provides case management support for mental health and addiction counseling programs.

### **A University**

The Orlando program is housed within the University of Central Florida and is the only program located in an educational institution. Early developers of the Orlando program were mainly from the university's marriage and family therapy program and had prior experience providing relationship enrichment workshops and counseling to both married and unmarried low-income couples.

\* \* \*

Within each of these institutional settings, the 10 program operators saw this preventive relationship skills program as a good fit with their organizational mission and as a logical extension of their current services. The unique backgrounds and institutional cultures of the SHM host agencies have contributed in substantial ways to each program's approach to implementing SHM, as the next section and Chapter 3 explore.

## **Variation in Characteristics of SHM Programs**

Differences in the settings and backgrounds of host agencies have contributed to their decisions about how to structure and implement SHM programs, along with other factors, like the local populations that they choose to serve. Table 2.3 summarizes several ways in which SHM program characteristics vary — all of which are important in understanding how individual programs operate on the ground.

**Some SHM programs offer services in both English and Spanish, and one offers services solely in Spanish.** El Paso, San Antonio, Oklahoma City, Shoreline, and Bethlehem decided early in their planning phases to serve both English- and Spanish-speaking couples. Reading also expected to serve both English- and Spanish-speaking couples but, during the pilot, found that the Spanish-speaking population was so large that it was more efficient to offer

**The Supporting Healthy Marriage Evaluation**

**Table 2.3**

**Selected Characteristics of Local SHM Programs**

Program Characteristic	Bronx	Orlando	Wichita	Oklahoma City	Pennsylvania			Shoreline	Texas	
					Bethlehem	Reading	Seattle		El Paso	San Antonio
Languages used in program	English	English	English	English, Spanish	English, Spanish	Spanish	English	English, Spanish	English, Spanish	English, Spanish
Target group within SHM population	None	None	None	Expectant and new parents	None	None	Expectant and new parents	None	None	None
Management and staff (FTEs)										
Managers	3.25	4.00	2.33	10.00	2.25	2.85	3.00	3.65	3.00	3.00
Outreach workers	2.00	3.75	4.00	5.00	2.00	2.10	2.38	4.00	1.00	2.00
Family support coordinators	4.00	5.00	4.00	16.00	2.50	3.50	4.00	5.00	3.00	4.00
Relationship and marriage education facilitators <sup>a</sup>	2.25	1.00	1.25	4.20	0.95	0.75	2.50	3.65	0.80	0.80
Relationship and marriage education										
Curriculum <sup>b</sup>	LCLC	FOF	WOR	BPP	WOR	WOR	BPP	LCLC	WOR	WOR
Length (hours)	24 hr	30 hr	30 hr	30 hr	28 hr	28 hr	30 hr	24 hr	30 hr	30 hr
Length of weekday workshops	10 wk	12 wk	11 wk	10 wk	14 wk	14 wk	9 wk	12 wk	15 wk	15 wk
Length of Saturday workshops	1 wk <sup>c</sup>	6 wk	1 wk <sup>c</sup>	6 wk	7 wk	14 wk	6 wk	12 wk	Not offered	Not offered
Family support										
Relationship inventory	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
In-person meetings in homes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No

NOTES: <sup>a</sup>Many of the site teams use contracted facilitators who are not part- or full-time site staff. This table shows the number of staff who are budgeted as full-time equivalents (FTEs). An FTE is the ratio of the number of full-time, part-time, and contracted hours paid during a period to the total number of work hours in that period. For example, 1.0 FTE is equivalent to one full-time staff person.

<sup>b</sup>LCLC = Loving Couples, Loving Children; FOF = For Our Future, For Our Family; WOR = Within Our Reach; BPP = Becoming Parents Program.

<sup>c</sup>All relationship and marriage education workshops in these sites begin with a six-hour session held on a Saturday; the remaining sessions are held on a weeknight for a shorter period of time.

services entirely in Spanish. In contrast, the programs in Wichita and Seattle decided to concentrate on offering services only in English. Orlando serves Hispanic couples but only those who can speak and understand English.

**Two SHM programs target expectant parents.** Both the Seattle and the Oklahoma City program have an additional eligibility criterion: enrollees must be expectant parents or have had a child in the past three months in order to enroll. These programs use the Becoming Parents curriculum, which focuses on improving a couple's relationship as they prepare for a new baby. Participants in Oklahoma City and Seattle are eligible to receive services until their child turns age 1; consequently, if they enroll during pregnancy, they may receive services beyond 12 months, for a period that is slightly longer than in the other eight SHM programs.

**The size and makeup of management teams and staff vary from program to program.** Table 2.3 shows the number of full-time-equivalent (FTE) employees that programs currently have budgeted to manage the program, recruit couples, provide family support services, and facilitate workshops. Oklahoma City has a particularly large complement of staff compared with the other programs, as that location serves twice as many couples as the others through its BSF and SHM programs. The two service delivery locations in Pennsylvania and Texas, as noted, each serve half the number of couples that the other six programs serve and, therefore, have smaller staff sizes.

There is little variation in the size of each program's management team: most programs have three to four staff managing the main SHM program components. Programs also have roughly similar numbers of staff for outreach and family support. Adding staff sizes together for the local Pennsylvania and Texas programs, most locations have hired the equivalent of three to four outreach workers. Programs in the Bronx and Seattle have found that they can successfully recruit SHM participants with just two outreach workers. With the exception of Oklahoma City, most programs have hired between four and six family support coordinators. Although the programs in Texas and Pennsylvania serve half the number of couples that other programs are serving, they found that an SHM program typically needs at least three family support staff.

Some programs use contracted, hourly staff to facilitate relationship and marriage education workshops, and they have typically budgeted for the equivalent of about one full-time employee to facilitate all workshops. However, other programs, such as Shoreline and the Bronx, hire a combination of full- and part-time staff to fill these positions and typically have the same facilitator pairs leading the majority of workshops. It is likely that couples in these programs will have similar experiences in their workshop. In contrast, the experiences of couples in programs like Orlando and Oklahoma City — which draw on a larger number of contracted facilitators — may vary more, depending on the facilitator pair who are assigned to run their workshop.

**The SHM programs offer one of four relationship and marriage education curricula.** All the programs were allowed to choose their relationship and marriage education curricula from among available curricula that were grounded in research, delivered in formats that could work well for couples with relatively low education levels, had substantial track records, and included a set of predetermined core topics. Orlando, Bethlehem, Wichita, and Reading had taught relationship and marriage education workshops in the past and preferred to continue using the curriculum with which they had experience. For the Bethlehem, Reading, and Wichita programs, this was *Within Our Reach* (WOR); for the Orlando program, it was *For Our Future, For Our Family*. Managers at Shoreline had a preexisting relationship with staff from the *Loving Couples, Loving Children* (LCLC) curriculum, while managers in the Bronx felt that LCLC would resonate well with the professional backgrounds of the staff they intended to use as relationship and marriage education facilitators. Both the San Antonio and the El Paso program chose to use *Within Our Reach*. As the developer of the *Becoming Parents Program* (BPP) curriculum, Seattle chose to use its own curriculum. Because Oklahoma City was already using the BPP curriculum in its Family Expectations program, it continued to use that curriculum for the SHM evaluation.<sup>2</sup>

**The length and schedule of relationship and marriage education workshops vary across programs.** The LCLC curriculum offers 24 hours of workshops, with up to 14 additional hours of supplemental sessions on such topics as parenting, which programs can offer as supplemental activities. *Within Our Reach*, *Becoming Parents Program*, and *For Our Future, For Our Family* each provide 28 to 30 hours of instruction time. Local programs structure workshop meeting times in different ways. It is common for workshops to take place weekly for 12 to 15 consecutive weeks, with sessions lasting two to two and a half hours each week. In addition to a weeknight option, programs in Shoreline, Seattle, Orlando, Bethlehem, and Oklahoma City also offer longer Saturday sessions that last five to six hours each, offered over six to seven weeks. In the Bronx and Wichita, all participants begin by attending one long session dubbed “Super Saturday.” Couples receive six hours of instruction on the first Saturday, followed by a series of two-hour sessions held on a weeknight.

**Family support services are staffed and structured differently across programs.** Early implementation of the family support component has been influenced by several factors, including the types of staff that programs have hired for the position of family support coordinator, whether programs use a relationship inventory to help structure in-person visits and estab-

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<sup>2</sup>Box 1.1 in Chapter 1 presents an overview of these curricula. For *Within Our Reach*, see Stanley and Markman (2008); for *For Our Future, For Our Family*, see Gordon, DeMaria, Haggerty, and Hayes (2007); for *Loving Couples, Loving Children*, see Loving Couples Loving Children, Inc. (2009); and for *Becoming Parents Program*, see Jordan, Stanley, and Markman (1999).

lish individual goals for the couple, and the location of in-person meetings with family support coordinators.

**A subset of sites uses relationship inventories to assess couples' strengths up front.** To help structure family support one-on-one work with couples, three SHM programs — Shoreline, Oklahoma City, and Wichita — use a *relationship inventory*. This is a surveylike questionnaire that asks individual spouses questions about themselves, their personalities, aspects of their couple relationship, and their expectations about romantic relationships in general. Each spouse's responses are then scored and compared with the other spouse's responses. Using this analysis, the inventory helps to identify the couple's relationship strengths and potential areas for growth. Family support workers seek to use these results to help guide the content of future one-on-one meetings with couples, although the intensity of such work varies by program.

**In-person meetings with family support staff are held on- and off-site.** While the SHM program model is not a home-visiting program, Bethlehem, Reading, and El Paso had prior experience operating such programs and have carried over some aspects of this model to their SHM programs. For example, in Bethlehem and Reading, workshops are held in such venues as church auditoriums, while more than 75 percent of meetings between couples and family support coordinators are held in couples' homes. Although the majority of visits in the other seven programs occur in the offices of the program operators, some use home visits in a limited way — for example, to reengage couples who have stopped participating or who have difficulty traveling to the program's office.

## Characteristics of Participating Couples

With low-income married couples as their common target population, SHM programs have recruited a varied group of participants who reflect the diversity of the communities in which they are located. As shown in Table 2.4, participants in the 10 programs vary across demographic indicators, including age, race/ethnicity, income, family structure, and marital characteristics.

**Across programs, enrolled couples are in their early to middle thirties, and husbands are two to three years older than wives.** In addition, Table 2.4 shows that the average age in the Oklahoma City and Seattle programs is roughly three to four years younger than in the other programs, likely because these two programs target expectant and new parents.

**About half the couples enrolled across the 10 SHM programs are Hispanic; 30 percent are white, non-Hispanic; and 16 percent are black, non-Hispanic.** As shown in Table 2.4, the El Paso and Reading programs have both enrolled almost exclusively Hispanic

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Table 2.4

Demographic Characteristics of Couples Enrolled Through August 2008

Characteristic at Random Assignment	Bronx	Orlando	Wichita	Oklahoma City	Pennsylvania			Texas		Overall	
					Bethlehem	Reading	Seattle Shoreline	El Paso	San Antonio		
Average age (years)											
Wife	34.7	30.7	31.1	26.4	32.9	31.8	26.1	32.7	33.8	31.2	30.5
Husband	37.2	33.3	34.0	28.6	34.9	34.5	28.6	35.1	36.4	33.8	33.0
Race/ethnicity (%) <sup>a</sup>											
Hispanic	43.0	44.4	15.0	32.0	75.8	97.4	21.5	27.7	97.4	90.8	49.7
White, non-Hispanic	2.3	29.9	63.2	49.4	17.3	0.8	52.2	50.2	1.6	4.7	29.9
Black, non-Hispanic	49.9	19.4	18.3	12.7	6.2	1.8	17.8	9.7	0.2	2.9	15.6
Other	5.2	10.2	9.1	5.9	0.8	1.0	18.3	19.7	1.5	2.2	7.1
Either spouse born outside the U.S. (%)	29.2	42.7	14.3	NA	60.8	93.3	35.6	46.9	71.4	54.4	46.8
Family income (%)											
\$0 to \$29,999	52.2	37.0	51.8	39.5	52.3	65.8	46.2	32.7	65.1	69.3	49.4
\$30,000 to \$44,999	19.4	41.0	19.2	22.4	26.2	28.0	30.8	30.3	23.0	18.2	25.0
\$45,000 or more	24.0	21.5	27.7	22.5	21.5	6.2	19.7	34.6	11.5	12.5	20.7
Income at or below 200 percent of poverty level (%)	69.7	76.7	76.7	63.3	79.5	94.3	72.6	57.7	87.3	86.7	74.7
Means-tested income sources (%)											
Free or reduced-price school lunch	34.1	41.8	39.1	NA	60.8	66.3	21.2	36.0	75.7	61.5	47.7
Income from public assistance <sup>b</sup>	54.8	67.6	53.4	68.4	51.5	70.0	78.4	54.0	67.4	66.9	64.0
Family structure											
Average number of children	2.0	2.4	2.4	1.9	2.6	2.7	1.0	2.1	2.4	2.4	2.2
Currently pregnant (%)	8.8	7.2	12.7	77.8	4.6	7.8	90.4	9.5	5.6	12.2	34.0
Stepfamilies (%)	NA	25.2	42.0	15.1	33.9	25.7	17.2	20.2	23.2	26.2	23.8
Average number of years married	7.3	6.2	5.9	NA	8.2	9.3	2.6	6.5	9.9	7.9	7.1

(continued)

**Table 2.4 (continued)**

Characteristic at Random Assignment	Bronx	Orlando	Wichita	Oklahoma City	Pennsylvania			Texas		Overall	
					Bethlehem	Reading	Seattle Shoreline	El Paso	San Antonio		
Number of couples	387	349	307	760	130	193	208	211	304	296	3,145
Months of sample intake	11.6	11.8	15.0	18.4	12.9	12.6	11.4	13.0	15.1	15.1	

SOURCE: Baseline Information Forms for couples randomly assigned from February 2007 through August 2008. This does not include the pilot period.

NOTES: Several questions were not asked at baseline in Oklahoma. Information about stepfamilies was not collected in the Bronx during this time period. Income is missing for 4.9 percent of the sample. These individuals are included in the denominator for income but not for the poverty calculation. "NA" indicates that data are not available.

<sup>a</sup>Race/ethnicity percentages are calculated for husbands and wives individually.

<sup>b</sup>Public assistance includes such programs as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food stamps, and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

families, and San Antonio and Bethlehem are serving populations that are majority Hispanic. The Reading program is the only SHM program offering services exclusively in Spanish.

**The median annual income for SHM couples is about \$30,000.** This is slightly higher than the federal minimum wage for two full-time workers and slightly less than 150 percent of the federal poverty line for a family of four. The percentage of couples enrolled in SHM whose family income is at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line ranges from 58 percent in Shoreline to 94 percent in Reading. Nearly two-thirds of enrolled couples receive income from public assistance, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); food stamps; and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The median income for married-couple households nationally in 2006 was \$69,716,<sup>3</sup> making the SHM sample significantly lower-income than nationally representative samples.

**All couples in the SHM evaluation are parents, and they have an average of two children.** Because the target populations of the Oklahoma City and Seattle programs are new and expectant parents, couples enrolled in these programs have fewer children than in other SHM programs, and the majority of women enrolled in these two programs were pregnant at the time of enrollment.

**While all couples are parents, other aspects of family composition are diverse.** Couples enrolled in SHM have been married for just over seven years, ranging on the low end from couples enrolled in Seattle, married an average of 2.6 years, to couples in El Paso, married an average of 9.9 years. Nearly a quarter of the families enrolled in SHM are stepfamilies, with proportions ranging from 42 percent of families in Wichita to 15 percent in Oklahoma City. Couples enrolled in Seattle have an average of one child, while couples enrolled in Reading have an average of about three children.

## Summary

This chapter describes three key forms of variation among the 10 local SHM program operators: type of host agency, program characteristics, and demographic characteristics of the couples enrolled in SHM. To better understand the content of services that were provided, as well as couples' experiences with those services, future implementation reports will analyze these variations in greater depth and in the context of a larger, potentially more diverse sample.

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<sup>3</sup>DeNavas-Wait, Proctor, and Smith (2007).

## Chapter 3

# Early Implementation Experiences of the SHM Programs

Even as the 10 Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM) programs operate in different contexts as described in Chapter 2, they share many characteristics and goals owing to the structured SHM model and research design. (See Chapter 1 and Figure 1.1.) Two requirements imposed by the study — to recruit large numbers of couples in a short time frame and, once enrolled, to maximize their participation in services — have been formative challenges in the programs' implementation experiences. In response, the programs have focused their implementation efforts on three main goals:

- Developing *strategic outreach and marketing methods* to recruit low-income married couples
- Organizing *service delivery logistics and program environments* in ways that encourage and facilitate participation
- Delivering *engaging, high-quality services* that are targeted to meet the needs of married couples

Day-to-day operations have also been influenced by *performance benchmarks* that establish targets for enrollment and engagement in services over time. This chapter explores how the performance-based environment and the goals outlined above have shaped implementation in the first year, and it presents lessons that the programs have learned as they sought, through strategic planning and through trial and error, to develop effective strategies that worked for their local contexts and populations. The chapter begins by describing recruitment strategies that have resulted in robust enrollment to date, followed by a discussion of engagement strategies and management practices.

## Developing Marketing and Outreach Methods to Recruit Low-Income Married Couples

One of the special challenges of the SHM study is that programs must enroll roughly 800 couples over a two-year period, mindful that enrollment requires that both the husband and the wife commit to participating. Locating low-income married couples has not been a straightforward task for most SHM programs, since this is not a group traditionally targeted by social service agencies. Developing outreach and marketing strategies consumed much of the programs' attention in the first year, and successful recruitment has meant exercising creativity and persistence. Over time, programs have come to rely on four main strategies:

- Cultivating partnerships with local social service, government, community, and faith-based organizations for outreach and referrals, including programs within the host agency
- Finding opportunities to talk directly with couples about the program, often through referral partners or at community events and fairs
- Launching targeted mass media campaigns
- Encouraging currently enrolled couples to refer family and friends

Table 3.1 illustrates how various recruitment partners and approaches contribute to enrollment across programs. Government and social service agencies have yielded the highest number of overall enrollments, with programs like Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) generating more than a fifth of all enrolled couples. Hospitals and health clinics account for almost 14 percent and have been particularly important sources for the two programs that focus on couples expecting a baby and for the Bronx program, which is affiliated with a hospital. Referrals from faith-based organizations, churches, and educational settings such as Head Start programs collectively account for just over 13 percent of all enrollments.

With the majority of couples coming to SHM from health care agencies and social service agencies, outreach staff and managers in most programs dedicate time each month to cultivating relationships with these referral partners. SHM recruitment managers typically approach agency management first to discuss how SHM could benefit the agency's clients. If the manager agrees to work with SHM, a recruitment staff is then typically assigned as the main contact for that agency, and the staff become responsible for delivering brochures and other outreach materials, making presentations to line staff, and visiting the agency regularly to maintain the relationship. Some programs have written agreements with their partners, which may specify a target number of couples that the referral partner strives to send to SHM each month.

Though many of the SHM programs began recruitment expecting that line staff at referral partners would routinely send names of interested couples from their client base directly to SHM, this has been the exception rather than the rule. Line staff at many agencies may not have time to do this level of outreach in addition to their other responsibilities, or they may be concerned about communicating incorrect information about the program's purpose or eligibility requirements. When early referrals came in too slowly to allow SHM programs to consistently fill scheduled workshops, SHM staff switched gears and began asking their referral

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### Table 3.1

#### Recruitment Sources for Couples Enrolled Through August 2008

Recruitment Source	Example	Percentage of Couples
Government/social service agencies	Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	21.2
SHM couples/family and friends	Other couples already enrolled in SHM	16.4
Hospital/health service providers	Pediatric clinics, public health clinics	13.5
Staff recruitment efforts	SHM facilitators, other nonrecruitment staff	10.0
Ads/media/flyers	Billboards, radio advertisements	8.3
Schools/colleges/education centers	Head Start, community college	6.8
Local churches/faith-based organizations	Catholic Charities	6.5
Fairs/events	Back-to-school night, community health fair	5.7
Other	Retail store, walk-in	4.2
Military base	Air Force base	1.8

SOURCE: SHM management information system for couples randomly assigned from February 2007 through August 2008.

partners whether they would provide space and opportunities for SHM staff to talk with potentially interested couples themselves — for example, staffing an information table in a lobby during peak business hours or making presentations at group workshops or classes, such as prenatal education or parenting workshops. With many partners, this has reduced the burden on line staff while still allowing them to support SHM.

Thanking referral partners for their contributions has helped maintain productive relationships over time. Some SHM programs host lunch gatherings to recognize referral partners for their support, and some have hosted open houses, offering tours and the opportunity to meet couples who are currently participating in the program. One SHM program sends a monthly newsletter to all referral partners, updating them on program events and recognizing the agencies for their efforts. Some programs make personal visits to their referral partners to deliver baked goods or other tokens of appreciation to generate goodwill and acknowledge their contribution to SHM’s success.

In general, maximizing opportunities to talk directly with couples has been a key part of successful recruitment for most SHM programs. As outlined in Box 3.1, recruiters seek these opportunities in a variety of venues, and they have invested time in developing effective marketing messages and hiring staff with skill sets that adapt well to direct marketing and outreach.

### **Media Campaigns**

In parallel with efforts to cultivate referral partners and market the SHM program directly to couples, media campaigns have helped the programs increase their name recognition and establish themselves as a trusted resource in their communities. SHM programs have experimented with such media efforts as:

- Placing billboard advertisements on busy streets in low-income neighborhoods
- Conducting interviews with local Spanish-language newspapers and television and radio stations
- Placing door-hangers at homes in low-income neighborhoods, with coupons that couples can redeem upon enrollment in the program for such items as free turkeys during the holiday season

Though such efforts do not appear to generate a large number of direct referrals for most of the SHM programs, some — including those in Oklahoma City and El Paso — report that couples in their areas do respond to media outreach, and they have found that it is effective to launch two or more concurrent media activities in an effort to saturate a specific geographic area with information. For example, working with its host agency’s public relations director, the El Paso program organizes several media outreach events a year, coordinating the installation of large-format medially billboards with press releases, interview spots on public television stations, and outreach via community events. Following such efforts, staff note an increase in calls from interested couples.

### **Encouraging Couples to Refer Their Friends**

Over time, as the SHM programs have gained visibility in their communities — with some now being featured in local press and radio shows — and as more couples complete workshops, the programs are finding that word-of-mouth referrals constitute an increasing percentage of overall recruitment. Some programs offer modest incentives to currently enrolled couples who refer a friend who then signs up, which may contribute to the success of this “couple-to-couple” recruitment method. Given this experience, SHM programs may find that

### Box 3.1

## Approaches to Recruiting Low-Income Married Couples

***Find opportunities to talk directly with couples.*** One SHM program manager stated that, as a new service in most communities, “Marriage education doesn’t sell itself,” noting that, in his experience, simply placing brochures and posters in places that low-income people frequent may help build name recognition but typically generates few direct calls from couples seeking to enroll. In most SHM programs, recruitment staff spend considerable time each week going out into the community and engaging couples in one-on-one conversation about the program. Recruitment staff station themselves at such locations as food banks, bus stops, libraries, entrances of low-cost retailers, and hardware, baby, and toy stores, as well as in the lobbies of referral partners. Attending community events, such as back-to-school and health fairs, also generates opportunities for staff to talk directly with couples.

***Develop effective marketing messages.*** For programs that rely heavily on this one-on-one recruitment method, managers and staff have invested considerable time in developing messages that effectively portray the program’s benefits and in training recruiters to make an effective delivery. Many recruiters have found it useful to develop 1-, 3-, and 5-minute versions of recruitment messages, and they frame messages in terms of how the program can help couples reach goals that are important to them. For example, rather than asking couples, “Are you interested in enrolling in free relationship education workshops?” recruiters ask couples questions like, “Do you want to learn how to be the best parent you can be for your kids?” or “If you could give your marriage a tune-up, what would you most want to improve?” followed by a brief description of how the SHM program can help them accomplish those goals. Recruiters also emphasize that the program offers couples a chance to spend quality time together each week without their kids — a free “date night” for the couple. Some staff note that focusing on the program’s benefits for children has been effective, particularly with Latino couples. As one El Paso recruiter puts it, “What’s best for your children is for you to be the best you can be as a couple.”

***Hire outgoing, goal-oriented staff.*** One-on-one recruitment methods require staff who are comfortable approaching strangers in public and skilled in delivering a concise, compelling marketing message. Because SHM programs have to reach high enrollment targets every month, staff must also be goal-oriented and comfortable in a fast-paced environment. After experiencing high turnover among their recruiters, many programs learned early on that the recruitment role is more akin to a fast-paced marketing and sales job than to delivering social services. Some programs, including those in Wichita and Shoreline, have begun hiring staff with backgrounds in sales and marketing, and they report that this has improved their recruitment capacity. Most programs have also made a point to hire both men and women for these positions, and they have been attentive to hiring recruiters from racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds that reflect the backgrounds of couples they are seeking to serve.

recruitment becomes easier as the programs mature and as relationship and marriage education services gain familiarity and credibility, much as parenting or childbirth classes already have in many communities.

The programs have learned over time that a recruitment technique that works in one community may not be well suited to another. Some programs, for example, like those in Wichita and Reading, have been successful in working with faith-based organizations as referral partners, whereas other programs have found it difficult to tap into these venues. The program in Oklahoma City reports that such mass media efforts as billboards contribute significantly to its recruitment efforts, whereas the Seattle program's bus ad campaign in surrounding low-income neighborhoods met with little success. There is no one formula that works in every community, and programs have learned through trial and error that diversifying marketing and outreach approaches early is the best way to identify strategies that work in local contexts, as well as ones that are less effective.

As of December 31, 2009, SHM programs had met their recruitment goals, enrolling a total of 6,300 couples into the study.<sup>1</sup>

## **Organizing the Program Environment and Logistics to Facilitate Engagement and Retention**

The SHM program model (Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1) is based on the assumption that, for most couples, changing behaviors and learning new skills that contribute to healthy marriages takes time and repetition, meaning that couples need to participate in services consistently over time. This presents an inherent challenge for program operators, who must work to keep both the husband and the wife engaged in services while recognizing that couples are managing busy lives and balancing multiple work and family obligations. With the goal of sustained participation for one year, the SHM programs have worked to make services as accessible and as welcoming as possible so that both mothers and fathers want to return week after week. The following section describes the programs' efforts to design accessible, welcoming, and high-quality services; discusses the role of family support services in encouraging participation; and highlights how the programs use incentives as a complement to their engagement strategies.

### **Creating a Welcoming Atmosphere for Couples**

As part of the basic design, SHM programs were advised to develop every aspect of service delivery to feel inviting, positive, and family-friendly to both members of the couple.

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<sup>1</sup>This includes couples enrolled in both the pilot sample and the evaluation sample.

Programs have done this in two main ways. First, many programs focus on training staff in customer service techniques, building a program culture in which couples are seen as valued participants and in which each staff member feels responsible for welcoming couples, helping when needed, and taking time to create personal connections. For example, several sites pay special attention to training reception staff to greet couples warmly and promptly, to offer toys to their children, and to remember couples and their children by name. Staff in some programs join couples for the meal that precedes workshops and supplemental activities, giving couples an informal venue for getting to know staff and other couples.

Second, staff have put effort into creating a welcoming physical space for services and workshops. Many programs have painted lobbies, workshop rooms, and offices in warm, bright colors; made curtains out of colorful material; and purchased or sought donated furniture such as couches, comfortable armchairs, and lamps. The San Antonio program, for example, is housed in a renovated school building. Staff redecorated a former classroom for their workshop space so that it resembles a comfortable lounge — painting the walls in a colorful scheme, installing lamps, hanging attractive pictures with family themes, and providing comfortable love seats. An adjacent room has been decorated for teens, who can come to play games, do homework, and socialize while their parents attend workshops.

Waiting areas in most programs offer resource material for parents, magazines that appeal to both moms and dads, toys and books for kids, and complimentary coffee and tea. Space for conducting enrollment and family support meetings is private, and most programs have offices with doors to ensure confidentiality. The two Pennsylvania programs in Reading and Bethlehem do not have dedicated space for workshops or supplemental activities because of space constraints at their host agencies. The programs rent space from local faith-based organizations, and facilitators travel each week to these locations. Using posters, easels, and inexpensive table decorations, facilitators work to make these rooms an attractive temporary workshop space.

### **Making Services Accessible for Working Parents**

Assuming that couples are more likely to participate if the services are easy to access, SHM programs have arranged logistics to make services as accessible as possible, focusing on four key areas:

- **Offering services at times when working parents can attend.** All programs offer workshops and supplemental activities on weekday evenings, starting between 5:30 and 6:30 P.M., and/or on Saturdays, experimenting with different times and days to find the ones that work for most couples. Some programs, for example, find Saturday workshops in high demand, whereas

Saturday events were poorly attended in other programs, and so they now offer workshops on weeknights only.

- **Offering services at locations that are easy to access.** Many programs have made an effort to locate services close to low-income neighborhoods and near public transit and easily available parking. Several programs are located in an office park or shopping district, while others are in or adjacent to residential areas where many participants live.
- **Providing transportation, child care, and emergency assistance.** All the programs offer transportation and child care assistance, structuring these supports in different ways to meet local needs. Programs located in urban areas — such as Seattle, Shoreline, and the Bronx — offer bus or metro tickets; in locations where public transit is limited, programs offer gas cards and parking assistance and, in some cases, taxi fares. In Reading, for example, where public transit is limited in the evening, the program offers taxi service, which is low cost in that area. Child care is provided on-site in seven programs, and the other three programs provide reimbursement for babysitting expenses. Many programs provide transportation and child care for both workshops and supplemental activities, and the majority make these supports available for family support visits on an as-needed basis. All programs also make limited emergency funds available to help couples address unexpected circumstances, such as a car repair, which might impede participation.
- **Providing meals for evening workshops and activities.** Because couples often come to workshops and activities directly from work, programs provide a meal for participants — typically served 30 minutes before the workshop begins. Mealtime provides an important opportunity for couples to socialize and build connections with one another, and this time is often lively, with couples chatting and interacting with their peers and staff. Some locations alternate meals provided by the program with potluck events at which couples are invited to share their favorite dish or a traditional food from their cultural background.

The SHM programs periodically ask couples for input to understand what barriers might be keeping them from attending workshops, supplemental activities, and family support meetings, and the programs tailor services in response to this feedback when possible. In sum, SHM programs have been structured to make it as easy as possible for couples to say yes. When asked what motivated him to participate, one participant noted, “You took care of all the reasons I might have said no!”

## **The Role of Family Support Services in Maintaining Contact with Couples**

Family support services are central to SHM's strategy for keeping couples engaged, particularly in light of difficult life circumstances that many couples face, which can affect their ability to attend workshops and other activities. Family support coordinators seek to engage couples in two main ways: by maintaining frequent contact with couples and by connecting couples to community resources to help address barriers to participation (for example, finding stable housing, job search assistance, or health care).

All the programs have the goal of quickly contacting newly enrolled couples — most often, by phone within 48 hours. During this first contact, family support coordinators typically welcome the couple to the program, schedule the couple for a workshop if this was not done at enrollment, schedule an in-person family support meeting, and inquire about the couple's needs for transportation, child care, or other resources. Then family support coordinators have a goal of maintaining regular ongoing contact with couples, with most programs concentrating these efforts during the time between when a couple enrolls and the end of the workshop, to encourage participation in as many sessions as possible.

Family support coordinators make contact with couples primarily by phone and, in many programs, call both the husband and the wife. Staff inquire whether the couple needs help arranging transportation, parking, or child care to get to the workshop, and they give a friendly reminder to come early for dinner. Staff also use e-mail, text messages, and mailings. Inasmuch as some family support staff report that this aspect of their job can be time-consuming, programs look for ways to streamline weekly contacts. The Seattle program, for example, has recently experimented with engaging volunteers and administrative staff to make weekly calls, which frees up family support coordinators to devote their time to in-person meetings. The programs in Oklahoma City, San Antonio, El Paso, and the Bronx send couples newsletters and events calendars either monthly or quarterly. If staff are unsuccessful in contacting couples by phone, e-mail, or text message, several programs conduct home visits, as described in Box 3.2.

## **Using Incentives to Encourage Participation**

All the SHM programs offer incentives as one way to strengthen engagement and retention efforts. From the outset, the programs were encouraged to offer modest incentives tied to key milestones that the program hoped couples would achieve. Programs were given basic guidelines on developing incentive packages, and they have experimented with various approaches in the number or value of the incentives that they give and how they are distributed

### Box 3.2

#### Using “Creative Outreach” to Reengage Couples

“Creative outreach” is a term coined by the Oklahoma City SHM program to describe efforts to reengage couples who have stopped participating in the program or who participate inconsistently. Managers keep a running list of couples whom the program has lost contact with, and they assign a team of staff to develop strategies to reengage each couple. Visiting the home is one common way to reach out to a couple, and Oklahoma City staff also visit couples at their workplace and in restaurants or coffee shops. Before going into the community, the team consults with the family’s workshop facilitator, the intake worker who recruited the couple, and other family support staff to gather information about issues that might be keeping the couple from participating. With addresses and phone numbers in hand, teams designate an afternoon to conduct home visits, bringing door-hangers that show the program’s logo and/or flyers with messages like “We’ve missed you!” and an invitation to an upcoming event. Teams may also take small gifts, such as diapers if they know that a couple has recently had a baby or gas cards or bus tickets — all with the goal of reconnecting with the couple and encouraging them to attend a workshop, family support meeting, or supplemental activity. The SHM programs in San Antonio, Reading, Bethlehem, Shoreline, and Wichita have adopted similar strategies.

over time. To increase initial engagement, for example, some programs, as in Oklahoma City, offer larger incentives for the first two or three relationship and marriage education workshops. Other programs, as in the Bronx, have experimented with offering incentives at the end of the series, to reward couples for completing most or all of the workshops. A handful of programs use incentives to help reinforce curriculum use at home — for example, by offering an incentive for couples who complete a team budgeting exercise at home and bring it to their next workshop.

Some programs concentrate their incentives on encouraging participation in relationship and marriage education workshops, while others spread incentives out over all three components, offering slightly larger amounts for workshops, hoping to engage couples up front, and then giving smaller amounts for family support services and supplemental activities that happen later in the program. To encourage participation in family support services, for example, some programs offer couples “points” for each completed activity, which can then be redeemed for gift certificates or prizes in values that increase with the number of points accumulated. Some locations offer cash or gift certificates to local retail stores, while others primarily offer gifts, such as photo albums or baby supplies for new parents. In Orlando, the program encourages participation in supplemental activities with an education focus by offering a \$100 incentive for

couples who attend four educational activities. Couples must complete all four in order to qualify, and the program offers two such activities each month, on various topics that complement the relationship and marriage education curriculum, such as parenting, money management, and child safety.

While the SHM programs report that incentives play a role in engaging couples, they note that incentives are not a substitute for high-quality, accessible services and skilled staff. Incentives are just one of several ways that programs can help encourage a hesitant spouse to attend a workshop, and they recognize and reward couples for investing time in their relationship. Future implementation research will describe in more depth the types of incentive structures that the SHM programs have used, though the study is not designed to evaluate the impact of incentives in engagement and retention.

## **Delivering Engaging Services That Are Relevant to Low-Income Married Couples**

SHM program staff know that, as with all voluntary programs, if couples do not find the services valuable in their day-to-day lives, they will not make the effort to come. Ensuring that the core program components are high quality, relevant, and engaging is thus an overarching goal for program managers and staff. This section describes how the SHM programs have approached this goal. Each of the three program components is discussed, and the section highlights programs' efforts to adopt the principle of delivering services from a couple-oriented, strengths-based orientation. Ways in which programs have adapted their services to make them culturally appropriate are also described, as are special efforts to engage men.

### **Relationship and Marriage Education Workshops**

With relationship and marriage education workshops at the center of the SHM model, programs have focused a good deal of up-front energy on hiring skilled staff, ensuring that facilitators have sufficient training and support to master the curriculum, and focusing on workshop quality. Are workshops sufficiently dynamic? Interactive? Do they use the right language and examples to appeal to the local population? Do facilitators know the material in enough depth to help participants apply the main ideas of the curriculum? The foundations for delivering high-quality, engaging workshops are the four curricula used by SHM programs.<sup>2</sup> Each is based on years of research and feedback that curriculum developers have used to improve content and techniques. In consultation with the SHM team, curriculum developers have tailored curricula for use with low-income populations. For example, developers have

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<sup>2</sup>The four curricula are outlined in Box 1.1 in Chapter 1 and are described more fully in Appendix A.

varied curriculum delivery — using a combination of oral presentation, video, interactive exercises, and self-directed activities — to appeal to different learning styles and to create a lively workshop atmosphere.

Programs typically staff workshops with a pair of facilitators, one male and one female. Professional backgrounds vary as a function of the host agency operating the SHM program or of the curriculum itself, but most programs have hired people with facilitation or teaching experience who are comfortable presenting to groups of adults. By pairing a male and female facilitator, programs hope to demonstrate that both perspectives are equally valued in the group and to give participants the opportunity to see positive, supportive interactions modeled by a male-female pair.

To varying degrees, the curriculum developer for each site monitors how the curriculum is being implemented, through phone conferences with facilitators and managers to provide feedback and by using video and audio recordings of workshops to assess quality and identify areas for improvement. Programs themselves use supervision and observation to monitor quality more frequently. In the programs in the Bronx, El Paso, Seattle, and both Pennsylvania locations, the relationship and marriage education supervisors also facilitate workshops, allowing them to stay closely connected to the challenges that staff face in running groups. In Orlando, facilitators have benefited from support and feedback of three of the program's managers, who were trained in the Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills (PAIRS) curriculum prior to beginning SHM. Because of their knowledge of the curriculum, managers are able to provide frequent monitoring and coaching to facilitators, in addition to the support they receive from the PAIRS staff themselves.

All four of the curricula are based on the theory that all couples, regardless of background, have assets to build on in their relationships and can learn new skills to improve their relationships in the ways that are important to them.<sup>3</sup> This orientation is at the heart of strengths-based practice, a principle in social service delivery that the SHM team has encouraged all programs to adopt as part of their efforts to design services in ways that couples find supportive and engaging, as described in Box 3.3.

### **Family Support Services**

One of the main tasks of family support coordinators is to maintain frequent contact with couples to encourage their participation in workshops and supplemental activities. If

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<sup>3</sup>As described in Chapter 1, the SHM programs are not intended for couples experiencing domestic violence, and curricula are not designed to work with couples facing those issues. All the programs work with local domestic violence agencies to screen couples for domestic violence before enrollment, and they refer these couples to appropriate services.

### Box 3.3

#### **Delivering Services from a Strengths-Based, Couple-Oriented Perspective**

A central goal for SHM programs has been to create an atmosphere in which couples are clearly valued and respected. The majority of programs operate from a *strengths-based* approach, centered on the belief that individuals — no matter what their background or circumstances — have the capacity to bring about change in their lives by drawing on skills and strengths that they already possess. This approach is increasingly articulated in social work literature,<sup>\*</sup> and many organizations espouse these values and train staff in strengths-based practices. In SHM, this means that family support coordinators do not try to “fix” a couple’s problems but, rather, engage the couple in such activities as goal planning, in which they define the areas that they want to work on while in the program. Family support coordinators then coach couples, encouraging them to apply skills from the workshops to reach their goals. This framework sets the stage for respectful and supportive interactions between staff and couples, which may contribute to a couple’s willingness to return for additional services.

A *couple-oriented* approach means that staff encourage couples to participate in workshops and activities together, emphasizing the importance of making a joint investment in improving their marriage. Family support coordinators meet with both members of the couple whenever possible and make efforts to place calls or send e-mails to both of them when following up with resources or extending invitations to events. In their meetings with couples, family support coordinators actively listen for opportunities to point out when couples are working as a team toward common goals and to reinforce these positive behaviors. The SHM team has provided technical assistance to support staff in these areas, and all the programs continue to refine these practices over time.

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<sup>\*</sup>See, for example, Mullaly (1993) and Saleebey (1997).

couples miss a workshop or event, family support coordinators are expected to call the couple in a timely manner, check in with them about whatever circumstances might be making it difficult to come, and schedule a makeup session. Family support coordinators also act as community resource specialists, helping connect couples with resources to address barriers that might make participation difficult. In addition, the family support coordinator’s role is also to coach couples as they incorporate new skills from the workshops.

Balancing these three roles has presented challenges for staff, and early observations of family support meetings suggest that programs vary in the emphasis they place on each role.

Staff report that maintaining contact with couples to encourage workshop attendance, scheduling and conducting makeup sessions, and helping connect couples to community resources to help address barriers to participation can easily take the bulk of their time in a given week. Staff also report that they serve couples with complex family circumstances, meaning that they at times devote considerable effort to locating appropriate resources and working with couples to overcome participation barriers. Given the demands that these two roles place on staff, family support coordinators face an ongoing challenge in making time for curriculum reinforcement activities, and some programs report that this receives less overall emphasis in their meetings with couples.

Over the past year, SHM programs have continued their efforts to improve the structure and substance of family support meetings by developing three tools to guide their work:

- **Protocols to guide in-person meetings.** Program managers and supervisors are developing written protocols as one way to help family support coordinators better manage their in-person time with couples. Protocols outline goals for each of the first five in-person meetings and are aimed at ensuring that meetings dedicate time to addressing barriers to participation and yet also leave time to check in with the couple about what they are learning in the workshops and how they are applying new skills. Staff note that following the protocols is most difficult with couples who have multiple needs or are in crisis — for example, having lost a job or housing. Managers in several programs report working continually with staff to balance responding to a couple’s need for resource assistance and focusing on strengthening their marriage.
- **Curriculum reinforcement materials.** Program managers have noted that coaching couples in relationship skills has been challenging for many family support workers. Until recently, most programs have had few standardized tools for family support staff to use in guiding curriculum reinforcement activities. While all staff are trained in their local curriculum, family support coordinators have discovered through trial and error that the activities that facilitators use to demonstrate and practice skills in workshops do not always translate easily into a one-on-one setting. To support staff development in this area, the curriculum developers from Loving Couples, Loving Children (LCLC) and the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) have created curriculum reinforcement handbooks and activities for family support staff to use in one-on-one meetings.

- **Relationship inventories.** Three of the SHM programs use relationship inventories to help structure family support meetings and to help family support coordinators get to know the couple and their goals for their marriage. Each member of the couple answers a questionnaire regarding strengths and challenges in their relationship, and then inventories are sent to the developers for scoring. Results are returned to the family support coordinator, who shares them with the couple in an in-person meeting. Information gathered in the inventory can help family support coordinators structure in-person meetings and more easily link curriculum content to a couple's specific goals. The programs in Oklahoma City and Wichita began using relationship inventories early in their operations, and they report that inventories are helpful in quickly engaging couples in family support meetings. The Shoreline program adopted a relationship inventory created by LCLC in late 2008.

In family support and all other aspects of their services, the SHM programs have made efforts to ensure that they are delivering services in ways that meet the needs of their diverse local populations, as highlighted in Box 3.4.

### **Supplemental Relationship and Marriage Education Activities**

During the initial SHM pilot period, most programs focused attention on recruitment, on establishing relationship and marriage education workshops, and on offering basic family support services. Most programs waited several months before launching supplemental activities. Once in the full evaluation phase, the programs began offering a limited menu of supplemental activities that were initially small in scale; by mid-2008, with workshops and family support services firmly established, they began taking steps to expand this component to serve increasing numbers of couples as more of them completed group sessions and to improve the overall quality of support services.

Engaging couples in supplemental activities has proved challenging, particularly once relationship and marriage education workshops are completed and couples are in less frequent contact with the staff. Over time, the SHM programs have learned that:

- **Supplemental activities must be scheduled frequently.** During early implementation, most programs offered a limited number of supplemental activities, which may have contributed to low participation, as staff found it more difficult to reengage couples after long breaks in programming. The majority of programs now offer at least one supplemental activity per month, and many are offering two or more, alternating social events with educational activities and booster sessions.

#### Box 3.4

### Making SHM Services Culturally Appropriate

SHM programs serve couples from a diverse range of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, and they have made efforts to ensure that services are delivered in culturally appropriate ways. The majority of programs have hired recruiters, facilitators, and family support coordinators whose ethnic and racial backgrounds resemble those of their local populations. The Reading program provides one example of this: staff are all Hispanic, bilingual, and from different countries of origin similar to the couples they serve. Offices and workshop rooms are decorated with posters representing diverse families, and marketing materials use photos and graphics that reflect the couples they serve.

For programs serving Hispanic populations, the outreach materials, curricula, and family support materials are in Spanish, and hiring bilingual staff has been essential to providing culturally appropriate services. Staff who work with Hispanic families also note the importance of being attuned to the cultural emphasis on the well-being of the extended family and to differences in the roles of men and women within some Hispanic families. In El Paso, for example, staff note that, for some couples, it is appropriate to place calls first to the husband when inviting the couple to events and activities. To make programs as inclusive as possible of couples from all backgrounds, the programs in Oklahoma City, Shoreline, Bethlehem, and the two Texas locations have offered supplemental activities in English with simultaneous Spanish translation.

- **Supplemental activities must be engaging and address topics that couples find relevant.** As with workshops, programs work to make supplemental activities as different from being in a classroom as possible. Activities typically begin with a meal, followed by an interactive couple activity. Examples include a “celebrate your culture” potluck dinner hosted by the Pennsylvania programs, to which couples bring a traditional food from their cultural background and share something about the importance of the dish with the group. Workshops on parenting and stepparenting have been regular features in the Orlando, Wichita, and El Paso programs. To add to the diversity of each month’s events, programs have engaged financial advisers, nutrition specialists, and parenting coaches. Several programs, including those in San Antonio and Wichita, use selected modules from the Ten Great Dates curriculum — a series of structured conversation topics for couples on communication, managing conflict, and balancing busy lifestyles — as a way to rein-

force the importance of fun and spending time together.<sup>4</sup> Each date begins with structured activity from the curriculum before couples have dinner. The Shoreline program hosted a Valentine’s Day family event featuring an activity from the LCLC curriculum, followed by dinner and dancing. The San Antonio program hosts family movie nights, with snacks, popcorn, and activities for the kids. Such events provide venues that low-income couples may not otherwise have time to enjoy together as a couple and as a family, and strengthen their connections to other families and to the program itself.

- **Supplemental activities should be substantively linked to the curriculum and give couples the opportunity to practice skills.** In the Shoreline program, “Involved Mom” and “Involved Dad” sessions from the LCLC curriculum have been two popular activities that also provide opportunities to practice curriculum skills. The Bronx program has developed a “graduation” practice skills activity that takes place after a 10-week workshop series ends. The goal is to acknowledge the end of the workshops with a small ceremony and give couples an opportunity to practice the skills from the workshops. Staff set up “skills stations” around the room, each related to a key theme in the curriculum. For example, one station might be on “Gentle Start Up,” the LCLC framework for communication, and staff coach the couple as they practice this technique on a topic of their choosing. Couples spend 15 to 20 minutes at each station, and workshop facilitators circulate to assist couples and answer questions.

In short, the programs are using an array of approaches to engage couples in supplemental activities. Some programs have also used supplemental activities to reach out to men and to ensure that program activities appeal to their interests, as highlighted in Box 3.5.

## **Operating Programs in a Performance-Based Environment**

Like many programs that receive government funding, SHM programs are funded through contracts with performance requirements. These contracts include benchmarks that

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<sup>4</sup>Arp and Arp (1997).

### Box 3.5

#### **Making Special Efforts to Engage Men**

With men making up half of SHM's target group, local programs strive to ensure that services are structured so that men feel welcome and that programs have been designed with men's needs and interests in mind. Many programs have hired male staff as recruiters, family support coordinators, and workshop facilitators, so that men see "people like them" when coming to the program and may feel more able to connect with staff. In some cases, programs have found that male staff have more success in engaging a husband who may be hesitant about enrolling, and, in some programs, male staff support their female counterparts by making phone calls to husbands with invitations to workshops and supplemental activities. Some programs also offer supplemental activities specifically geared toward men, such as workshops on being an involved dad, father-and-baby play groups, pickup basketball games, and men's lunch groups to discuss specific topics from the relationship and marriage education workshops. Some programs use funding from other sources to offer job search and employment assistance, as men often request this assistance when discussing resource needs.

influence every aspect of day-to-day SHM operations. As illustrated in Table 3.2, these benchmarks emphasize three main goals:

1. Enrollment
2. Engagement and retention in marriage education
3. Engagement and retention in all program components

For some of the SHM programs, operating under a performance-based contract was new. Even for those programs experienced in operating with government funding, the specific requirements articulated in the SHM benchmarks and the close monitoring of performance by the SHM research team was new to most programs. In addition to frequently reviewing performance data with the SHM team, program managers were expected to become fluent in a Web-based management information system (MIS) to generate reports to track their own data and to use this information to guide and refine local program operations. Programs dedicated considerable effort to incorporate routine tracking into their day-to-day processes, and technical assistance efforts have focused heavily on building programs' capacity in this area. Progress is ongoing, and lessons from the programs' early experiences, outlined below, may be informative to other programs about how to establish management and monitoring structures that support achieving performance benchmarks.

## The Supporting Healthy Marriage Evaluation

**Table 3.2**

### Enrollment and Participation Benchmarks

Benchmark Definition	Full Evaluation Goal
<b><u>Enrollment</u></b>	
Number of couples randomly assigned	800 per site <sup>a</sup>
<b><u>Engagement and retention in marriage education</u></b>	
Percentage of couples attending at least 1 workshop within 4 months of enrollment	80%
Percentage of couples attending at least 2 workshops within 4 months of enrollment	70%
Percentage of couples attending at least 5 workshops within 6 months of enrollment	50%
<b><u>Engagement and retention in all program components</u></b>	
Percentage of couples completing 2 family support meetings within 4 months of enrollment	70%
Percentage of couples completing 2 family support meetings and 2 workshops within 4 months of enrollment	60%
Percentage of couples attending at least 1 extended activity within 6 months of enrollment	70%

NOTE: <sup>a</sup>The two locations in both Texas and Pennsylvania each have the goal of enrolling 400 couples, for a combined total of 800 couples per "site."

### **Setting and Monitoring Benchmarks**

Benchmarks were established based on the SHM team’s experience with previous research demonstrations and other similar voluntary programs. There was no precise formula for determining whether specific benchmarks were too high or too low, but they were based on the team’s best estimates of what similar programs have been able to achieve. The SHM team has emphasized to program managers that these benchmarks are set at minimal levels and that they should be striving to exceed them whenever possible. Technical assistance provided by the SHM team has also emphasized this point, and some programs have established interim performance goals to help ensure that they meet contractual benchmarks within the specified time frame. For example, some programs work toward the goals of contacting newly enrolled couples within 24 hours and of assigning each couple to a workshop within 30 days of enrollment. As Table 3.2 shows, the SHM benchmarks are calculated based on couples’ participation

within four months or six months of enrollment, giving programs a window of time in which to initially engage each couple and then to establish participation in the full menu of services.

### **Structuring Management Approaches to Achieve Benchmarks**

All the SHM programs have experienced challenges in establishing staff and management structures to achieve these performance levels, and an important aspect of the SHM's technical assistance agenda has been supporting programs in these efforts. Benchmarks and related data are monitored either weekly or every two weeks at meetings between the programs and the SHM team. Programs are held accountable for performance, and they submit monthly written reports outlining their successes for that month as well as areas for improvement. The SHM team plays an active role in helping the programs develop plans for corrective action when needed, strategizing ways to improve operations and holding programs accountable for implementing corrective measures. Programs are thus engaged with the SHM team in a continuous process of reviewing performance, assessing factors that may be contributing to low performance, and developing strategies and tracking mechanisms to improve the program. This technical assistance has been ongoing since the programs entered the planning and pilot phase, and it will decrease over time as the programs mature.

Key to tracking performance in this manner is the common management information system (MIS), which is used by all but one SHM program.<sup>5</sup> The system is designed as a management tool as well as a means of recording research data. In the MIS, staff record participation in program services, contacts with couples, and case notes from their interactions. The SHM team has developed management reports for various aspects of participation, which provide a basis for the weekly or twice monthly meetings between program managers and the SHM team.

In a performance-based environment, managers have realized that the daily and weekly efforts of each staff person can make the difference between meeting a target or falling short, and program managers have developed mechanisms for tracking detailed information about staff efforts. For example:

- Programs hold frequent staff meetings in which performance compared with benchmark goals is reviewed and analyzed in a group setting.
- Staff contribute to strategizing about ways to improve performance, and they take responsibility for implementing new methods to meet goals.

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<sup>5</sup>Oklahoma City uses its own MIS, which was developed prior to the start of the SHM program, to share performance data with the SHM team.

- Individual staff are held accountable for meeting weekly target benchmarks (for example, for achieving a specific number of intakes or in-person family support meetings).
- Supervisors conduct one-on-one supervision with staff, typically weekly or every two weeks.
- Supervisors use the MIS to review individual cases during supervision.
- As part of supervision, many supervisors routinely observe staff working with couples.
- Programs conduct ongoing staff training in areas where staff have particular challenges.

These activities require a significant time commitment from the programs' management team. A number of programs are developing protocols for supervisors as well as guides for one-on-one supervision in an effort to clearly define how supervisors should assess staff performance. In addition to the methods noted above, some programs are experimenting with conducting "quality improvement" telephone surveys with couples regarding their experiences in the program.

## **Summary**

The four areas outlined above — developing strategic outreach and marketing methods, making services accessible, delivering engaging services, and managing for performance — have been the key focus of SHM managers and staff during the first year of program operations. Next, the final chapter of this report provides an early snapshot of participation patterns in local SHM programs during this time period. The early data suggest that SHM programs are meeting with some success in encouraging participation in services. Future implementation research will examine in more detail how the 10 local programs differed in their implementation of the SHM program over time, both to aid in the interpretation of program impacts and to provide operational lessons for future voluntary programs serving couples and families.



## Chapter 4

# Highlights of Early Participation Patterns in SHM

This chapter provides an early snapshot of how the strategies described in Chapter 3 are working with regard to enrollment and ongoing participation by couples across the 10 programs. Since the SHM program model is based on the assumption that both spouses will participate in services and that families have other demands on their time, the SHM team and local program staff assumed from the outset that achieving high participation rates and continued participation over time would be challenging. Thus, as discussed in Chapter 3, the local programs have employed a range of strategies to promote participation. The analyses reported in this chapter provide the first look at participation patterns for all couples who were enrolled in the program group from the pilot programs and the early phase of full program operations through August 2008.<sup>1</sup> Attendance reported here is for both spouses together. The results indicate that attendance has been strong, particularly in relationship and marriage skills workshops and family support service meetings.

Although SHM is a yearlong program, the present report describes participation patterns only during the first six months that couples were in the program — the first half of program participation.<sup>2</sup>

## Relationship and Marriage Education Workshops

- **Programs are engaging high proportions of couples in relationship and marriage education workshops.**

Table 4.1 shows participation rates in relationship and marriage education workshops for each local program and across all the programs. Overall, 81 percent of couples in the

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<sup>1</sup>Note that because the 10 local providers began their pilot programs at different times, these analyses include participation rates for providers that have had different lengths of time to develop the three program components and their engagement strategies. On average, as of August 2008, they had been operating for 14 months, ranging from 11 months for the program in Seattle to 15 months for those in Wichita, El Paso, and San Antonio. Oklahoma City's program had been operating for even longer than the 18 months that it had been enrolling SHM couples, since it was operating a program very similar to SHM in the 18 months prior to beginning its SHM program. (Table 2.1 in Chapter 2 presents the local program operators and their pilot and evaluation start dates.)

<sup>2</sup>Later reports will describe participation patterns for couples from the full evaluation stage, since those are the couples for whom program impacts will be measured. Later reports will also measure participation for the full length of the program, which in most locations is one year. In the two Pennsylvania locations, services are offered to couples for nine months; in Oklahoma City and Seattle, couples may participate until the baby they were expecting when they entered the program is a year old.

program group attended at least one workshop during the first six months that they were in the program. These attendance rates range from 74 percent in Reading to 87 percent in Wichita.

There is little information available about participation in other relationship education programs. The SHM participation rates are, however, in the same range as those achieved in two other studies with published participation rates. For example, the recent Supporting Fathers' Involvement Study in California, which served both unmarried and married couples, reports that 95 percent of fathers and 96 percent of mothers attended at least 13 hours of relationship and marriage education groups. In Building Strong Families — a voluntary program for low-income parents who are unmarried — 61 percent of early enrolled couples participated in group sessions within the first eight months after enrollment.<sup>3</sup>

- **SHM couples tend to continue in workshops once they begin to participate. On average, couples who initiated attendance have attended 20 hours of workshops in the first six months.**

The four different SHM relationship and marriage education curricula (Box 1.1 in Chapter 1 and Appendix A) are delivered in 24 to 30 hours over six to fifteen weeks. As shown in Table 4.1, couples who participated in at least one workshop session attended, on average, 20 hours of workshops, or about 74 percent of the intended curriculum. This suggests that, despite other family or work obligations, couples in most of the SHM programs are making an effort to attend fairly consistently over time, once they attend one workshop. Across the SHM programs, couples attended an average of 16 hours of workshops together (including zero hours for those who did not attend at all).

- **Both spouses attended relationship and marriage education workshops together.**

One goal of the SHM program is for spouses to attend workshops together, because the curricula are all designed to be most effective when both members of the couple attend. However, sometimes individuals' job schedules or other circumstances make it difficult for one spouse to participate, and individuals are allowed to participate alone on occasion, if necessary. Analyses not shown indicate that while occasionally spouses attend separately, husbands and wives attend together 93 percent of the time. Thus, the local programs have successfully conveyed the value to couples of attending together.

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<sup>3</sup>Dion et al. (2008).

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Table 4.1

Participation in Relationship and Marriage Education Workshops Within Six Months of Enrollment,  
for Couples Enrolled Through August 2008

Participation in Workshops	Bronx	Orlando	Wichita	Oklahoma City	Pennsylvania			Seattle	Shoreline	Texas		Overall
					Bethlehem	Reading				El Paso	San Antonio	
Number of couples in program group	229	194	169	378	87	125	128	128	166	165	1,769	
Percentage of couples who attended at least 1 workshop together	76.9	80.4	87.0	81.7	74.7	74.4	75.0	83.6	86.1	85.5	81.0	
Average number of hours that both spouses attended	13.3	15.4	23.0	20.1	8.5	12.5	13.4	11.8	18.4	16.6	16.3	
For couples who attended at least 1 workshop together:												
<i>Average number of hours attended</i>	<i>17.3</i>	<i>19.2</i>	<i>26.4</i>	<i>24.5</i>	<i>11.4</i>	<i>16.8</i>	<i>17.8</i>	<i>14.1</i>	<i>21.4</i>	<i>19.5</i>	<i>20.1</i>	
<i>Percentage of sessions attended<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>76.0</i>	<i>79.9</i>	<i>82.8</i>	<i>82.0</i>	<i>52.3</i>	<i>64.4</i>	<i>68.1</i>	<i>60.6</i>	<i>73.8</i>	<i>67.8</i>	<i>73.9</i>	
Months of intake included	12	12	15	18	13	13	11	13	15	15		

SOURCE: SHM management information system.

NOTES: Relationship and marriage education workshops do not start immediately after enrollment. Couples may need to wait for a period until a new group starts. The sample includes couples enrolled in the program group between February 2007 and August 2008. Both regular group workshops and makeup sessions are included.

Italic type indicates measures that include only the couples who attended at least one workshop.

<sup>a</sup>This percentage is the number of modules that the couples attended, divided by the number of modules offered to the couples as part of their assigned group. For couples whose workshop sessions ended, this is the percentage of the total curriculum. For couples whose workshop is ongoing, this is the percentage of the curriculum sessions that were offered to date.

## Family Support Services

- **Rates of initial participation in family support meetings are similar to those for relationship and marriage education workshops. More than 85 percent of early SHM enrollees met with their family support coordinators within six months of enrollment.**

Table 4.2 shows participation rates for in-person family support meetings, by local program and overall. Overall, 85 percent of couples in this early sample attended at least one meeting with a family support coordinator during their first six months in the program. Rates range from a low of 71 percent in Seattle to a high of 90 percent in Bethlehem, Shoreline, and San Antonio.

Among those couples who meet with a family support coordinator, they typically have four or five meetings in the first six months of the program. The number of meetings that occur is influenced both by the goals specified by the individual programs and by scheduling issues that are encountered. Most programs intend for family support workers to meet with couples every two weeks or monthly in the early stage of the program. Only about one-third of couples met with their family support worker at least monthly (six or more times). When meetings did occur, they averaged 46 minutes in length and ranged from 31 minutes in the Bronx to 56 minutes in Orlando and Oklahoma City.

This participation information for family support focuses on in-person meetings, since these were assumed to provide the most substantial opportunity for family support coordinators to work with couples toward specific relationship goals. However, in their work engaging families in the entire program, family support coordinators also kept in touch with couples in a variety of other ways, including phone calls, postcards, e-mails, and check-ins that lasted fewer than five minutes; none of these contacts are included here.

- **Local programs varied widely in the number of referrals made for additional services in the community.**

The most common referrals are for parenting or child health services (such as parenting classes, child development education, and child care assistance); for general assistance (such as help applying for public assistance); and for help with basic needs (such as housing assistance and food support). Overall, 41 percent of couples received at least one referral, and there was a substantial range from 17 percent in Reading to 59 percent in Seattle (Table 4.2). These differences may reflect several factors, including the level of disadvantage of couples in different local programs, the extent of outside services available in different communities, and the familiarity of family support coordinators with different types of services in the community.

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Table 4.2

Participation in Family Support Meetings Within Six Months of Enrollment, for Couples Enrolled Through August 2008

Participation in Family Support Meetings	Bronx	Orlando	Wichita	Oklahoma City	Pennsylvania			Shoreline	Texas		Overall
					Bethlehem	Reading	Seattle		El Paso	San Antonio	
Number of couples in program group	229	194	169	378	87	125	128	128	166	165	1,769
Percentage of couples who had at least 1 family support meeting together	80.8	87.1	89.3	87.0	89.7	78.4	71.1	89.8	88.6	89.7	85.4
For couples who had at least one meeting together:											
<i>Percentage who had:</i>											
<i>1 to 2 meetings</i>	<i>35.1</i>	<i>33.1</i>	<i>26.5</i>	<i>14.2</i>	<i>26.9</i>	<i>56.1</i>	<i>40.7</i>	<i>38.3</i>	<i>21.8</i>	<i>39.9</i>	<i>30.2</i>
<i>3 to 5 meetings</i>	<i>38.4</i>	<i>50.3</i>	<i>36.4</i>	<i>24.6</i>	<i>33.3</i>	<i>34.7</i>	<i>39.6</i>	<i>44.3</i>	<i>43.5</i>	<i>34.5</i>	<i>36.7</i>
<i>6 or more meetings</i>	<i>26.5</i>	<i>16.6</i>	<i>37.1</i>	<i>61.1</i>	<i>39.7</i>	<i>9.2</i>	<i>19.8</i>	<i>17.4</i>	<i>34.7</i>	<i>25.7</i>	<i>33.2</i>
<i>Average number of meetings per couple</i>	<i>4.0</i>	<i>3.5</i>	<i>4.8</i>	<i>6.3</i>	<i>5.4</i>	<i>2.8</i>	<i>3.6</i>	<i>3.6</i>	<i>4.5</i>	<i>4.1</i>	<i>4.5</i>
<i>Average number of minutes per meeting per couple</i>	<i>30.6</i>	<i>56.4</i>	<i>48.0</i>	<i>56.4</i>	<i>45.6</i>	<i>44.4</i>	<i>37.8</i>	<i>50.4</i>	<i>31.2</i>	<i>42.6</i>	<i>45.6</i>
Percentage ever referred to other services	49.3	44.3	28.4	47.4	47.1	16.8	59.4	53.9	28.9	30.3	41.3
Months of intake included	12	12	15	18	13	13	11	13	15	15	

SOURCE: SHM management information system.

NOTES: Only meetings that are longer than five minutes are included.

The sample includes couples enrolled in the program group between February 2007 and August 2008.

Italic type indicates measures that include only the couples who had at least one family support meeting.

Referrals to other services include job training/search, physical and mental health services, financial planning, and parenting classes.

## Supplemental Activities

- **Half of the couples enrolled in SHM attended at least one supplemental activity together during their first six months in the program.**

Table 4.3 shows participation rates for supplemental activities, by local program and overall. While some programs offer supplemental activities to couples from the moment that they enroll, other programs wait to offer supplemental activities until couples complete the relationship and marriage education workshops. This limits the number of couples who could have attended activities within their first six months in the program. Nevertheless, 50 percent of couples attended at least one supplemental activity together during their first six months in the program. Across the local programs, this rate ranged from 35 percent in Bethlehem to 60 percent in El Paso.

Across the entire program group, couples attended an average of one supplemental activity within six months of random assignment. The typical couple who attended any supplemental activities participated in three activities. Later reports are likely to show increases in participation in supplemental activities, both because couples are invited to participate in them for 12 months and because several programs started to operate supplemental activities later than the other components, so that this component was less fully developed during the time period covered in this report.

## Summary

The participation information presented in this chapter is for an early group of SHM couples at a relatively early point in program implementation. The results suggest that many low-income couples who volunteer for this kind of relationship and marriage education program will attend and continue to participate. Using the strategies described in Chapter 3, local SHM programs have been relatively successful at working with couples as a unit and at engaging both members over time in both group workshops and family support. Some of the programs have been more successful than others. All the programs will continue to refine their engagement and retention strategies, based on local factors that may influence couples' ability and interest in participating. It is likely that later reports will find different participation rates in each component than presented here, as the number of enrollees grows, programs continue to refine their operations, and the length of follow-up expands from six months to twelve months per couple.

The Supporting Healthy Marriage Evaluation

Table 4.3

Participation in Supplemental Activities Within Six Months of Enrollment, for Couples Enrolled Through August 2008

Participation in Supplemental Activities	Bronx	Orlando	Wichita	Oklahoma City	Pennsylvania		Seattle	Shoreline	Texas		Overall
					Bethlehem	Reading			El Paso	San Antonio	
Number of couples in program group	229	194	169	378	87	125	128	128	166	165	1,769
Percentage of couples who attended at least 1 supplemental activity together	39.7	56.2	48.5	52.4	34.5	49.6	47.7	53.9	59.6	48.5	49.8
Average number of activities attended together	0.8	1.7	1.5	2.1	0.5	1.1	0.8	1.2	1.8	1.3	1.4
For couples who attended at least one activity together:											
<i>Average number of activities attended by couples together</i>	<i>1.9</i>	<i>3.0</i>	<i>3.1</i>	<i>4.0</i>	<i>1.3</i>	<i>2.3</i>	<i>1.7</i>	<i>2.2</i>	<i>3.0</i>	<i>2.7</i>	<i>2.8</i>
Months of intake included	12	12	15	18	13	13	11	13	15	15	

SOURCE: SHM management information system.

NOTES: The sample includes couples enrolled in the program group between February 2007 and August 2008.

Italic type indicates measures that include only the couples who attended at least one supplemental activity.



**Appendix A**

**Relationship and Marriage Education Curricula  
Used by SHM Program Operators**



As mentioned throughout this report, the 10 local Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM) programs chose among existing relationship and marriage education curricula that were grounded in marital relationship research, had a track record, were typically used in multiple settings, and covered the range of topics included in the SHM program model, based on current research. The curricula had all been adapted for lower-income couples from earlier versions that were used with middle-class couples. Adaptations include the use of multiple learning approaches (for example, group discussion, individual couple activities, video demonstrations, role-playing, and demonstrations by facilitators); the opportunity for skills practice during the workshops; and the use of content, examples, and video demonstrations designed to be relevant to a diverse group of couples.<sup>1</sup>

### **Within Our Reach (Adapted from Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program, or PREP)**

Developed by Scott Stanley and Howard Markman of the University of Denver, Within Our Reach (WOR) is a variant of their earlier Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), a curriculum that is based on longitudinal relationship research and has shown positive effects on relationship quality or stability in earlier random assignment studies with middle-class couples. Used by the SHM programs in Wichita, Bethlehem, Reading, El Paso, and San Antonio, WOR is based on the same theoretical foundation that supported PREP but also includes new learning approaches and relationship insights from empirical work focused on economically disadvantaged and ethnically diverse populations. PREP takes a cognitive-behavioral approach to relationship and marriage education, focusing on helping couples modify their behavior and thoughts about their relationship so as to reduce, and better manage, negative moods and emotions. Also central to PREP's approach is its focus on different types of safety that it characterizes as essential to maintaining healthy relationships: safety in interaction (can talk openly about issues), personal safety (freedom from fear of harm), and safety in commitment (mutual support, teamwork, and a clear future together). (See Stanley and Markman, 2008.)

### **For Our Future, For Our Family (Adapted from Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills, or PAIRS)**

Lori Gordon, the marital and family therapist who developed the Practical Applications for Intimate Relationship Skills (PAIRS) program, drew from the extensive content of PAIRS to create the For Our Future, For Our Family (FOF) curriculum for the SHM target population. Used by the Orlando program, the objectives of PAIRS (and, thus, of FOF) are “to know and

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<sup>1</sup>For more information on how curricula were selected and adapted, see Knox and Fein (2009).

nurture oneself and one's partner, to enjoy differences rather than see them as a threat, and to learn to view one's relationship as an ongoing source of mutual pleasure." Within this framework, a relationship that is not satisfying is viewed as the result of implicit and explicit roles and expectations within the relationship. The curriculum emphasizes the importance of love and nurturance in helping couples to express their emotions honestly, as well as the effect of prior experiences on self-esteem and current relationships. Hence, PAIRS places a major focus on "bonding," or developing emotional and physical closeness within the marital relationship. (See Gordon, DeMaria, Haggerty, and Hayes, 2007.)

### **Loving Couples, Loving Children (Adapted from Bringing Baby Home)**

Used by SHM programs in the Bronx and Shoreline, Loving Couples, Loving Children (LCLC) is based on over 30 years of research conducted by John Gottman, a professor at the University of Washington. LCLC is organized around the belief that the underpinning of a healthy relationship is a strong friendship, indicated by positive emotions shared in nonconflict interactions. In addition, LCLC proposes a four-part process for problem-solving that includes gentle start-up of challenging conversations, accepting the validity of multiple perspectives, becoming skilled at repair and recovery conversations, and compromise. In LCLC workshops, couples are encouraged to share their hopes for themselves and their marriage and to explore the personal experiences that shaped their beliefs and expectations. By discovering and validating each spouse's values and dreams, the couple can reduce damaging interactions related to perpetual problems and can build a sense of shared meaning and identity as a couple. (See Shapiro and Gottman, 2005; [www.LCLCOnline.org/curriculum.htm](http://www.LCLCOnline.org/curriculum.htm).)

### **Becoming Parents Program (Adapted from an earlier version of Becoming Parents)**

The Becoming Parents Program (BPP), developed by Pamela Jordan of the University of Washington, is a relationship and marriage education curriculum intended for couples expecting the birth of a child. The curriculum is used by the SHM programs in Seattle and Oklahoma City and is based on the PREP curriculum described above, which contributes much of the curriculum's material on strengthening couple relationships. Different from PREP, however, is that BPP emphasizes "self-care," under the premise that in order to have a healthy relationship partners must also take care of themselves as individuals. In addition, BPP includes empirically based information about child development and parenting that is intended to help couples successfully co-parent and to reduce stress on the relationship introduced by the addition of a new child. In general, the knowledge and skills imparted in BPP are done so in the context of a new birth in the family and are linked to parenting decisions. (See Jordon, Stanley, and Markman, 1999.)

**Appendix B**

**Profiles of Local SHM Program Operators**



## Orlando, Florida

### The Together Project

**Host organization:** Marriage and Family Research Institute at the University of Central Florida (UCF)

**Program name:** The Together Project

**Area population:** Of all people living in the Orlando metro area, 45 percent identify as white, 22 percent as Hispanic, and 27 percent as African-American or black.<sup>1</sup> The median income in the city of Orlando is \$46,324.<sup>2</sup>

**Characteristics of participants enrolled through August 2008:** Of the individuals that UCF has recruited for the study, 44 percent identify as Hispanic, 30 percent as white, and 19 percent as African-American or black. Seventy-seven percent of families report household income at or below 200 percent of the federal the poverty line.

**Prior experience:** In early 2003, with federal funding allotted from the Florida Department of Children and Families' Stronger Marriages and Stronger Families Research Project, staff from UCF's counselor education program began providing couple enrichment workshops, couples counseling, and premarital counseling to ethnically diverse, low-income families in the Orlando area. Over time, these faculty gained support from UCF and created the Marriage and Family Research Institute, now an officially recognized institute within UCF as well as within the state's university system. Prior to Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM), institute staff and faculty had some experience in running short-term group sessions and providing services for married couples, but they did not have extensive experience providing case management or making referrals to other services for low-income couples.

**SHM program setting:** Located on the main campus of UCF, the Together Project occupies a small building that staff have remodeled to look like a home. Warm colors, bright lighting, comfortable love seats, multiple paintings, and plants scattered throughout the space create a

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<sup>1</sup>Because respondents could check off "white" or "black as well as "Hispanic," these percentages may add up to more than 100 percent.

<sup>2</sup>Conducted by the United States Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey estimates are used to report on demographic information throughout the profiles of local program operators and are based on data collected over a three-year time period. The estimates represent the average characteristics of population and housing between January 2005 and December 2007 and do not represent a single point in time (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2005-2007).

welcoming and homey atmosphere. Private rooms where staff meet with couples are furnished with small couches and armchairs rather than office furniture.

**Staffing:** All staff providing SHM services and facilitating activities are employees or contractors of UCF. A unique feature of this program's staffing strategy is that while managers occupy full-time positions, graduate students in therapy, social work, and education programs compose the bulk of recruitment, enrollment, and family support staff. These students work part time in conjunction with their graduate studies. Facilitators, some of whom are faculty members in the counseling school, are contracted hourly for their services and have a variety of professional backgrounds. The program has increased the size of the staff over time, and it currently employs two full-time recruitment workers, four part-time enrollment workers, seven part-time family support coordinators, fourteen contracted facilitators, and six unpaid administrative interns.

## **SHM Program Operations**

**Management structure:** The Together Project's management team is led by a principal investigator who oversees the program budget, supervises the program manager, interfaces with the UCF Office of Research and Commercialization and UCF's finance office. Day-to-day operations are overseen by a program manager and three supervisors overseeing recruitment, family support/supplemental activities, and marriage education, respectively. The marriage education supervisor also oversees staff training and technology.

**Recruitment:** The program recruits the majority of couples from waiting rooms at Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) centers and health clinics run by the Orange County Health Department. UCF has a signed Memorandum of Understanding with the county health department that formally allows recruiters from UCF to sit in WIC waiting rooms on certain days of the week and to speak directly with potential study participants. Recruiters use this same strategy at community health fairs, held about twice a month in the Orlando metropolitan area, at which staff talk with potential program participants. However, many couples do contact the site directly, after seeing marketing materials and fliers at one of the many businesses or agencies where recruitment staff leave information about the program.

**Enrollment:** Recruitment staff spend about 30 hours in the field each week talking with interested couples, and enrollment staff then follow up with them by phone and e-mail to schedule an enrollment appointment. The program manager takes a performance-based approach to managing staff and provides recruiters and enrollment workers with weekly quantitative goals for the number of enrollments that each staff person is expected to complete.

**SHM curriculum:** UCF chose the For Our Future, For Our Family (FOF) curriculum for two reasons.<sup>3</sup> First, UCF had previous experience working with Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills, or PAIRS, on an evaluation of a different version of the FOF curriculum. More important, however, is that the curriculum's focus on building skills to strengthen the emotional connection between partners is consistent with the professional counseling backgrounds of management and staff. All facilitators must complete 64 hours of training in FOF and must observe three workshops before beginning to facilitate a relationship and marriage education workshop themselves, and they must work in concert with a more experienced facilitator for their first three groups.

**Relationship and marriage education:** The Together Project offers relationship and marriage education workshops on weekdays and Saturdays. Couples have a choice of attending workshops held either one night a week from 6:30 to 9:00 P.M. for twelve consecutive weeks or on Saturdays from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. for six consecutive weeks. To the extent possible, couples complete the curriculum with the same workshop group that they begin with, as the curriculum sessions build on one another. Couples who miss a workshop can make it up during a one-on-one meeting with their family support coordinator. If couples are unable to complete the workshop series with their group, they can switch to another workshop, although this practice is discouraged. The average size for both weeknight and Saturday workshops is seven to nine couples, and the program begins about two new workshops per month. All workshops are facilitated by a male-female team.

**Family support:** Family support services are provided primarily by part-time staff who are graduate students in UCF's counseling and social work departments. In addition to promoting participation in program activities, family support coordinators have an initial meeting with couples within two weeks of enrollment and then are expected to hold in-person meetings about once a month, depending on the couple's level of need. With their counseling backgrounds, the family support coordinators tend to emphasize their role in reinforcing the lessons in the curriculum and to focus less on making referrals to outside services.

**Supplemental activities:** Supplemental activities are typically held on weeknights and last from two to three hours; they are open to all currently enrolled couples. The program emphasizes educational activities, and it offers four such activities per month. These take place at the program location, and couples can attend as many as they like. Sessions are focused on reinforcing the workshops, and they cover such topics as becoming a more nurturing parent. In addition, social events complement the educational activities and are organized primarily around "date nights." Social activities occur off-site and focus on learning new skills, like cooking or danc-

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<sup>3</sup>Appendix A presents an overview of the curricula used in the local SHM programs.

ing, while also building on the curriculum lessons, like fostering fun and friendship in marriage. Couples are limited to attending three date nights, due to budget restrictions. As noted below, the program offers incentives to couples for attending educational activities only.

## **Participation Supports**

**Child care:** For children age 18 or younger, the Together Project provides child care at a nearby location during all educational supplemental activities and during relationship and marriage education workshops. The program does not provide funds to couples who choose to use a private babysitter.

**Transportation:** Cash payments averaging about \$10 each are provided as needed to couples who express that they cannot attend a workshop, family support visit, or supplemental activity because of a lack of transportation. Funds are typically spent on gas, as most couples do have access to a car. For couples without a car, the program arranges travel by taxicab.

**Incentives:** The program reinforces attendance at workshops and educational supplemental activities by providing cash incentives. After attending their fourth, eighth, and twelfth marriage education workshop, couples receive \$50, \$70, and \$100 dollars, respectively. Once a couple attends four educational supplemental activities, they receive \$100. Following completion of workshops — to encourage continued engagement — couples also receive \$10 for attendance at each visit that they have with their family support coordinator.

## **Wichita, Kansas**

### **Marriage for Keeps**

**Host organization:** Catholic Charities

**Program name:** Marriage for Keeps

**Area population:** Of all residents in Wichita, 69 percent identify as white, 12 percent as Hispanic, and 11 percent as black or African-American. The median household income in the city of Wichita is \$42,536.

**Characteristics of participants enrolled through August 2008:** Of individuals the Marriage for Keeps program has enrolled, 63 percent identify as white, 18 percent as black or African-American, and 15 percent as Hispanic. Seventy-seven percent of the families Wichita has enrolled report an income less than or equal to 200 percent of the federal poverty line.

**Prior experience:** The Marriage for Keeps program was formed as a partnership between Catholic Charities Wichita and the Kansas Healthy Marriage Institute (KHMI), a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening Kansas families through marriage and relationship education. In partnership with KHMI, Catholic Charities operates the Wichita Marriage for Keeps program and oversees Marriage for Keeps programs in three additional locations in Kansas, with the support of a grant from the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Wichita is the only Marriage for Keeps location participating in the Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM) demonstration. Catholic Charities offers a food bank, counseling, immigration, and emergency services in the same location as Marriage for Keeps. The program has been able to draw on Catholic Charities both as a source of referrals and as a resource for enrolled couples in need of outside assistance.

**SHM program setting:** Located in downtown Wichita, Catholic Charities is accessible by public transit and is centrally located for the SHM target population. Marriage for Keeps shares the first and second floors of the Catholic Charities building with other agency programs. Couples meet with intake workers and family support coordinators on the first floor and attend relationship and marriage education workshops in a large, brightly decorated workshop space

on the second floor. The workshop space and couple meeting spaces are furnished with couches and are designed to be comfortable and appealing to both men and women.<sup>4</sup>

**Staffing:** All Marriage for Keeps staff are Catholic Charities employees and were hired specifically for the SHM project, so they were new to the agency. Wichita's staff has grown since operations began, and the program currently employs two recruitment workers, two intake workers, four family support coordinators, seven part-time relationship and marriage education facilitators (who facilitate both marriage education workshops and supplemental activities), an administrative assistant, and a database specialist.

## SHM Program Operations

**Management structure:** The Marriage for Keeps program manager oversees the entire program and directly supervises the workshop facilitators. This manager is also responsible for overseeing operations at the three other Marriage for Keeps locations in Kansas, which are not part of the SHM study. A program coordinator supervises recruitment, enrollment, and family support staff. An assistant coordinator has responsibility for organizing supplemental activities, and a lead family support coordinator assists in family support supervision and training. A recruitment consultant supports management of recruitment efforts.

**Recruitment:** Couples enrolled in Marriage for Keeps are recruited primarily from local Catholic churches, by referrals from current program participants and from such Catholic Charities programs as the food bank. In the early months of the program, Marriage for Keeps relied heavily on Catholic churches to refer couples, but the program was challenged to find low-income couples through these venues. Churches are still an important source of referrals; the program advertises in church bulletins, and recruiters go to churches to talk directly with potential participants. However, to better reach the low-income target population, the program has reached out to government and community agencies to establish formal referral relationships, such as with the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS). Two recruitment workers who have marketing backgrounds are primarily responsible for outreach and recruitment. They are assigned to cultivate relationships with specific referral partners, and they also do direct outreach to couples who receive services at those organizations.

**Enrollment:** Marriage for Keeps relies primarily on interested couples' calling the program directly to set up enrollment appointments after they hear about the program through one of the

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<sup>4</sup>As of January 2009, the Wichita Marriage for Keeps program moved the majority of program operations to a new location at Newman University in Wichita, due to space constraints at Catholic Charities. Program staff maintain offices at Catholic Charities and continue to conduct some family support meetings and enrollments there.

outreach methods described above. Intake workers and the administrative assistant are responsible for scheduling couples for enrollment appointments, for screening couples for eligibility, and for conducting the enrollment process. Intake workers are available during evening and weekend hours to accommodate the schedules of working families.

**SHM curriculum:** Marriage for Keeps uses the Within Our Reach (WOR) curriculum based on the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP). Marriage for Keeps chose WOR because the management team had prior experience using PREP and had already been trained to facilitate this curriculum. Before working with groups, facilitators complete a 24-hour, four-day training in WOR led by PREP staff.

**Relationship and marriage education:** Each relationship and marriage education workshop series begins with a “Super Saturday” six-hour session that covers several WOR topics. After completing the Saturday workshop, couples attend the remaining two-hour workshops for eleven weeks, on weekday evenings from 6 to 8 P.M. Management has stated that the purpose of Super Saturday is to help quickly foster group cohesion among couples, which they hope then translates into higher participation in subsequent groups. The average workshop size is eight to ten couples, and the program begins one or two workshop groups each month. If couples miss the first six-hour session, they are assigned to a future group, because program managers believe that the content and group bonding of the first week are essential to success in subsequent sessions. To make sure that couples who miss workshops keep up with the rest of their group, facilitators offer a 30-minute makeup session each week before the group begins, in which material from the previous week is covered in a small-group setting. If a couple cannot attend this, they can arrange a one-on-one makeup session with their family support coordinator. Marriage for Keeps provides breakfast and lunch for couples at the first Saturday session and dinner at weeknight sessions. Facilitator teams are male-female pairs, including one husband-wife pair.

**Family support:** Marriage for Keeps has four family support coordinators, the majority of whom have backgrounds in counseling for couples or individuals. Family support coordinators aim to meet with couples every two weeks during the first three months in the program, then meet in person and over the phone at least once per month for the next four to nine months, and meet monthly for the remaining months of the program year. Couples complete the ENRICH relationship inventory during their first three months in the program.<sup>5</sup> Family support coordinators use the results as the foundation for future visits, working with couples on the relationship goals and strengths that they identify in the inventory.

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<sup>5</sup>Olson and Olson (1999).

**Supplemental activities:** Marriage for Keeps centers its supplemental activities on selected modules from the Ten Great Dates curriculum.<sup>6</sup> Couples gather at the program for a short group marriage education session, then go out on an individual date that is to include a related discussion topic or activity. The program offers one additional family event or workshop each month, such as workshops on time management and stepparenting or family events such as picnics.

## **Participation Supports**

**Child care:** To defray child care costs while attending the program, Marriage for Keeps gives couples a \$30 gift card each week that they attend a relationship and marriage education workshop and a \$60 gift card for attending a six-hour Super Saturday session.

**Transportation supports:** All couples receive a \$10 gas card or a bus pass to cover the cost of traveling to the program for relationship and marriage education workshops.

**Incentives:** To encourage participation in family support and supplemental activities, couples earn five “Marriage for Keeps bucks” for each meeting that they attend with a family support coordinator and for each supplemental activity that they complete. After collecting a minimum of 20 Marriage for Keeps bucks, the couple can redeemed them for a gift card of their choice.

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<sup>6</sup>Arp and Arp (1997).

## **Bronx, New York**

### **University Behavioral Associates SHM Program**

**Host organization:** University Behavioral Associates (UBA)

**Program name:** University Behavioral Associates SHM Program

**Area population:** Of people living in the Bronx, 51 percent identify as Hispanic, 30 percent as black or African-American, and 13 percent as white. The median household income in Bronx County, NY, is \$36,409.

**Characteristics of participants enrolled through August 2008:** Among those enrolled in the UBA SHM program, 50 percent are black or African-American — the highest proportion of all 10 SHM programs. Another 43 percent are Hispanic, and 2 percent identify as white. Seventy percent report family income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line.

**Prior experience:** UBA is a subsidiary of Montefiore Medical Center, which provides 40 percent of all health care services in the Bronx. Since 1995, UBA has provided case management services to individuals receiving publically funded substance abuse treatment, with clients referred by the New York City Human Resources Administration. UBA's case management services focus on preparing individuals for employment and, in some instances, on monitoring their participation in substance abuse treatment programs.

**SHM program setting:** Housed in a newly remodeled space, the UBA SHM program office layout resembles the layout of a standard medical office. When a couple first arrive, they are greeted by the receptionist at the front desk and are offered snacks and drinks while they wait for their appointment or program activity to begin. The waiting space features magazines appropriate for both men and women and a television set that plays family-appropriate movies. The office features a private meeting space for relationship and marriage education workshops; the space is large enough to accommodate 15 couples and still allow participants to branch off and work separately with their spouse. Humorous, framed comic strips about marriage are scattered throughout the workshop space. Several private offices furnished with a desk, computer, and chairs are available for staff to meet with couples one-on-one.

**Staffing:** Montefiore guidelines concerning the staff credentials needed to perform particular types of work with clients have influenced many of UBA's staffing decisions, and, in general, these requirements have meant hiring staff with graduate degrees. Three of the four program supervisors and five of the seven relationship and marriage education facilitators are clinical psychologists. The program manager and two other facilitators have a master's degree. All family support staff have a bachelor's degree and prior experience in social work or human ser-

vices. Currently, the program employs two full-time recruitment workers, four full-time family support coordinators, four part-time and three contractual facilitators, and two full-time data entry/administrative assistants. Three of the four part-time facilitators also act as full-time supervisors of program components.

## **SHM Program Operations**

**Management structure:** The UBA SHM program has one program manager, and three full-time supervisors oversee recruitment and the family support component, the workshop component, and the supplemental activity component, respectively. All three supervisors also facilitate workshops.

**Recruitment:** Nearly half of all enrolled couples are recruited from Montefiore Medical Center clinics. Because of UBA's affiliation with Montefiore, the program is permitted to recruit in waiting rooms at several high-volume clinics, such as those offering pediatric and obstetric-gynecological (ob-gyn) services. Recruitment workers visit clinics during normal business hours during the workweek to do direct outreach to couples, and couples also respond to brochures left in the clinic waiting areas and call the program directly for more information. Because of the limited amount of time that recruitment workers have with potentially eligible couples in the waiting rooms and because normally only one spouse is present, recruitment workers deliver short, three- to four-minute recruitment messages to potentially interested individuals, and they follow up by phone with those who give out their contact information. About one-quarter of enrolled couples are referred to the program by currently participating couples.

**Enrollment:** For each recruiter, the recruitment supervisor sets the goal of scheduling 15 enrollment appointments every week. Since 30 percent to 40 percent of couples who schedule an enrollment honor their appointments and complete enrollment, each recruitment worker enrolls about five couples per week. To accommodate couples' work schedules, recruitment workers alternate their own schedules to ensure that enrollment appointments can be offered in the afternoons and evenings during the workweek. Before being enrolled in the program, interested couples must commit to one of the upcoming scheduled workshops, in order to facilitate quick engagement in the program.

**SHM curriculum:** UBA selected the Loving Couples, Loving Children (LCLC) curriculum in part because of LCLC's basis in long-term research on determinants of marital stability. The program also believed that LCLC's various teaching modalities — lectures, handouts, videos, role-playing, and group discussion — would appeal to the different learning styles of their local population. Facilitators must attend a three-day training in order to lead relationship and marriage education workshops.

**Relationship and marriage education:** UBA’s workshops begin with an all-day “Super Saturday” session, during which couples complete the first three of the twelve LCLC workshops. Couples then attend weekly workshops that run from 6 to 8 P.M. for nine consecutive weeks. The purpose of the intensive Super Saturday workshop is to quickly foster a sense of group cohesion among couples, which may encourage continued attendance. Couples who miss the Super Saturday are reassigned to the next scheduled workshop series. If couples miss a weekly workshop session, they are allowed to make up the missed session by attending another group’s workshop, which is possible because the program is running workshops three to four nights a week every week. Workshop size ranges from nine to thirteen couples, and workshops are facilitated by male-female pairs. The program begins new workshops every two to three weeks.

**Family support:** Family support meetings at UBA begin with an initial meeting between a couple and a clinical supervisor directly after enrollment. This first meeting focuses primarily on completing a needs assessment. The couple’s responses to the assessment are used to create an individualized program services plan that loosely guides family support coordinators’ work with couples before and while they attend their workshops. Family support coordinators are required to meet with couples in person at least three times over the course of their participation in the workshops. Once couples graduate from their workshops, family support coordinators contact couples as needed. They call couples to remind them of scheduled workshop sessions, invite them to supplemental activities, and provide individualized support services to help couples address needs that may undermine their relationship or impede access to program services. Because of specific Montefiore union regulations, family support staff are not permitted to reinforce curricular skills. As such, family support coordinators focus most of their efforts on providing support to couples to address other needs, which mostly center on housing and employment issues.

**Supplemental activities:** The program schedules three to four supplemental activities each month. All couples who complete their workshops are invited to return a week later for a “graduate practice session,” during which couples practice specific LCLC skills. Most other supplemental activities are designed by the program staff and reinforce specific themes within the core LCLC curriculum, such as stress and parenting. The program also offers informational activities on topics like credit, budgeting, and physical health. Substantive links to curricular content are also made during these informational supplemental activities.

## **Participation Supports**

**Child care:** Montefiore does not permit on-site child care at UBA. To compensate couples for child care expenses, the program offers \$50 to couples after completing enrollment to defray child care costs, and up to a total of \$600 per couple is distributed at intervals during the

workshop series. Couples receive \$25 in child care reimbursement for attending any supplemental activity.

**Transportation:** To compensate for transportation costs, couples receive an \$8 MetroCard (pass to New York City's public transit system) after completing enrollment, after each workshop and each supplemental activity, and after each in-person meeting with family support coordinators.

**Incentives:** The program views its child care package as an incentive to attend program activities. It also gives small gifts at different points in the workshops and raffles off one \$300 gift card to one couple at the end of each relationship and marriage education workshop series.

# Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

## Family Expectations

**Host organization:** Public Strategies, Inc.

**Program name:** Family Expectations

**Area population:** Of people in Oklahoma City, 60 percent identify as white, 14 percent as black or African-American, and 15 percent as Hispanic. The median household income in Oklahoma City is \$40,751.

**Characteristics of participants enrolled through August 2008:** Family Expectations targets low-income expecting parents. Among those enrolled in Family Expectations, 49 percent identify as white, 32 percent as Hispanic, and 13 percent as black or African-American. Sixty-three percent of these couples have a family income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line. Unlike other SHM programs, Family Expectations offers services to both married and unmarried couples, but only married couples participate in the SHM study.

**Prior experience:** Public Strategies, Inc., is a for-profit public relations firm experienced in project management. It was selected by the state to manage the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI), whose goal is to reduce the state's divorce rate by expanding access to relationship and marriage education services. Through this initiative, Public Strategies gained experience managing relationship and marriage education services for diverse populations and in 2003, was selected to participate in the Building Strong Families (BSF) study funded by the Administration for Children and Families, providing relationship and marriage education services to unmarried expecting couples. Public Strategies built on the BSF infrastructure in launching SHM, making it unique among SHM program operators, the majority of whom had very little experience operating this type of program. Though the two studies serve different target groups, BSF and SHM services operate using the same basic structure, and both married and unmarried couples attend the workshops.

**SHM program setting:** Family Expectations is located on the first two floors of a commercial building that houses Public Strategies, Inc., as well as other private companies. The workshop rooms and private meeting rooms for couples are decorated with cheerful, bright colors and have comfortable furniture. The program's goal is to create an inviting space that feels unlike other social service settings. In the reception area, couples can help themselves to snacks and can browse magazines. Three spacious workshop rooms are used for relationship and marriage education workshops and supplemental activities, and they are furnished with reclining armchairs and dining areas.

**Staffing:** In addition to SHM and BSF funding, Family Expectations receives funding from the State of Oklahoma and the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) to operate the program, which, along with funding from BSF, results in a staff that is larger than any in other SHM program. Public Strategies staff have a strong focus on finding the right personality and fit for the program culture, rather than a specified set of skills; as a result, program staff have a variety of professional backgrounds. Family Expectations employs four recruitment workers (responsible for recruitment and enrollment), fifteen family support coordinators, thirty part-time relationship and marriage education facilitators, two fatherhood and employment specialists who focus on recruitment and engagement of fathers, two creative outreach specialists who assist with engagement and retention efforts, a receptionist, and an information technology (IT) specialist.

## **SHM Program Operations**

**Management structure:** To manage an organization of its size, Family Expectations has three management tiers: upper management, managers, and supervisors. Upper management consists of the company's president, the chief operating officer/chief financial officer, and a program administrator who oversees the entire Family Expectations program, develops policies and procedures, identifies continued areas for improvement, and also has other responsibilities within Public Strategies. A site administrator is responsible for managing daily operations and supervises the three program managers: the relationship and marriage education manager, family support manager, and recruitment manager. These three managers are responsible for oversight of their respective program components, and they manage a team of supervisors, who directly manage line staff in each program area. Relationship and marriage education and recruitment each have one supervisor, while the family support team has three supervisors assigned to manage small teams of family support coordinators.

**Recruitment:** Because the program targets parents expecting a baby, Family Expectation's key recruitment sources are public health clinics that provide prenatal services to Medicaid recipients as well as Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) offices. The program also recruits at community events that target expectant parents, such as a locally sponsored "Baby Expo." The state of Oklahoma also periodically mails the program's brochure to Medicaid clients, which has been a productive recruitment source. Oklahoma signs Memoranda of Understanding with referral partners, which allow them to station recruiters at clinics and events to talk directly with couples. Additionally, the recruitment manager and supervisor closely manage relationships with referral partners by regularly visiting all referral agencies and bringing small tokens of appreciation for providing referrals to the program.

**Enrollment:** Recruitment is managed with a tight focus on performance benchmarks. Supervisors meet with staff daily to ensure that they are on track to meet monthly and weekly recruitment goals and to discuss strategies for reaching out to couples who may be difficult to engage.

Recruitment workers also have one-on-one weekly supervision meetings in which areas for improvement and training are identified. Recruitment workers come with a wide range of experiences, including marketing and sales, but none are from a social service background.

Recruitment workers are responsible for recruitment tasks as well as for completing the enrollment paperwork with couples.

**SHM curriculum:** Family Expectations uses the Becoming Parents Program curriculum, an adaptation of the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) for expecting parents. Public Strategies administers other relationship and marriage education programs for other target populations, and it uses PREP-based curricula in all programs that it administers. PREP’s evidence-based curriculum especially appealed to management at the SHM program.

**Relationship and marriage education:** Relationship and marriage education workshops take place on Saturdays and weekday evenings. A group series consists of either 6 six-hour Saturday workshops or 10 three-hour weeknight workshops. Some groups begin with a longer Saturday session followed by 7 shorter weeknight workshops. Couples who miss workshops can make up the session by attending the same session with a different group. Family Expectations runs multiple concurrent groups, so couples have numerous opportunities to complete makeup sessions. Group size ranges from 15 to 20 couples. The program has a large team of 30 part-time facilitators, who work in male-female pairs. The Becoming Parents Program curriculum also includes “communication coaches,” who work one-on-one with couples during certain workshops to practice communication techniques. A unique feature of Oklahoma City’s workshops are hosts and hostesses — couples who have been through the program and whom Family Expectations hires to greet current couples and assist with workshop logistics.

**Family support:** Family support coordinators aim to hold office visits with couples every other week during the first few months of the program, monthly once it is determined that a couple needs less frequent contact, and quarterly during the last few months of the program. Family support coordinators are provided with office visit guidelines that direct their meetings and make sure that such activities as needs assessments, goal plans, relationship inventories, and curriculum practice exercises are completed.<sup>7</sup> Family support coordinators meet weekly with their supervisor to review couples on their caseload and ensure that adequate services are provided to all couples. Family support coordinators come from a variety of backgrounds; some, but not the majority, have worked in social services or have previous case management experience.

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<sup>7</sup>The Oklahoma City program uses the ENRICH relationship inventory (Olson and Olson, 1999).

**Supplemental activities:** Family Expectations offers about 20 supplemental activities per month, roughly divided into four types of activities: reunion groups, ancillary sessions, support groups, and date nights. *Reunion groups* allow couples who have completed their workshops to reconnect with couples from their group and practice skills. *Ancillary sessions* are workshops on topics like infant care, child safety, or family nutrition and are designed to teach couples something new that can help strengthen their marriage and family. The program also organizes gender-specific support groups for moms and dads that refresh curriculum skills and allow couples to learn from one another and build support networks. Date nights are offered using the selected modules from the Ten Great Dates curriculum.<sup>8</sup>

## Participation Supports

**Child care:** To support relationship and marriage education groups and supplemental activities, Family Expectations provides on-site child care for children up to a year old. Couples with older children can request vouchers to pay for private child care.

**Transportation supports:** Couples can request taxis or bus vouchers to cover transportation costs for attending enrollment, relationship and marriage education groups, family support meetings, and supplemental activities.

**Incentives:** To encourage participation in the program over time, couples earn gift cards and cash for reaching certain milestones in the program — for example, for completion of 6, 15, and 30 hours of relationship and marriage education workshops. Additionally, couples who attend relationship and marriage education workshops, family support meetings, and supplemental activities receive “crib cash,” which can be used to purchase items at a small store known as “The Crib,” operated by Family Expectations and located in the program office. The Crib is a bright, attractive, storelike space offering such baby items as diapers, clothing, books, toys, and home safety equipment as well as family items like games and movies.

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<sup>8</sup>Arp and Arp (1997).

## Reading, Pennsylvania

### Strong Families

**Host organization:** The Community Prevention Partnership of Berks County (“The Partnership”) and its subcontractor, the Reading Berks Conference of Churches (Conference of Churches), operate Reading’s SHM program. The Partnership is the lead agency for the Pennsylvania SHM site, which also includes the Bethlehem Strong Families program (described below).

**Program name:** Strong Families

**Area population:** Of those living in the city of Reading, 52 percent identify as Hispanic, 10 percent as black or African-American, and 34 percent as white. The median household income in the city of Reading is \$24,047.

**Characteristics of participants enrolled through August 2008:** With 97 percent of its sample of Hispanic decent, the Reading program is one of the two SHM programs that serve the highest proportion of Hispanic couples. Two percent of participants identify as black or African-American, and less than a percentage point identify as white. The Reading program also has the highest proportion of couples living at or below 200 percent of the poverty line (94 percent) and has the largest proportion of couples in which at least one spouse was born outside the United States (93 percent).

**Prior experience:** The Partnership has extensive experience running case management services programs centered on drug and alcohol prevention. Both the Partnership and the Conference of Churches also have experience providing relationship enhancement services. From July 2002 to June 2006, the Partnership subcontracted with the Conference of Churches to offer workshops using the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) and Within My Reach relationship curricula. From July 2006 to June 2008, the Conference of Churches operated under a grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency to deliver the Within My Reach curriculum. From 2002 to 2008, the Partnership served as the lead agency for the Strengthening Families First, Healthy Marriage and Family Coalition. Further, between August 2004 and January 2005, the Partnership also served as the coordinating body for the Pennsylvania Healthy Marriage Initiative.

**SHM program setting:** Program services are delivered primarily outside the Partnership’s office. Because of space constraints, all relationship and marriage education workshops are held in a rented meeting space of a local church. Limited public transportation and difficulty scheduling around participants’ work schedules have meant that nearly all enrollment appointments

and one-on-one meetings with participants occur in their homes. Supplemental activities are held in larger venues, such as church auditoriums.

**Staffing:** Staff providing SHM services are employees or contractors of either the Partnership or the Conference of Churches. The family support component of SHM is based at the Partnership because of the agency's prior experience with case management service delivery. The relationship and marriage education component of SHM is housed at the Conference of Churches because of the agency's experience with facilitating couple relationship education workshops using the PREP and Within My Reach curricula. Currently, the Reading program employs one full-time and two part-time recruitment workers, three full-time and one part-time family support coordinators, and two part-time administrative and data entry workers. The program also contracts with six relationship and marriage education facilitators.

## **SHM Program Operations**

**Management structure:** The Reading program has one program manager, based at the Partnership, who also acts as the family support supervisor. Two additional supervisors based at the Conference of Churches oversee recruitment and relationship and marriage education, respectively. The Partnership also acts as the lead agency for the Pennsylvania SHM program, which includes both the Reading and the Bethlehem program.

**Recruitment:** The program recruits from diverse sources, including local schools and churches, WIC centers, Head Start programs, and immigrant service agencies. Approximately 40 percent of its couples are referred by couples currently participating in the program. The Reading program offers a modest incentive to couples already in the program who refer other couples. The incentive is advertised routinely at all program activities. Early in the study, the Reading program offered services in both English and Spanish; after experiencing very high demand for services in Spanish, however, the program began offering services exclusively to Spanish speakers — the only site in the study to do so.

**Enrollment:** Recruitment workers are responsible for scheduling and completing enrollment. Rather than assigning individual enrollment goals for each recruitment worker, the supervisor takes a team approach and sets a monthly enrollment target of 22 couples, which is divided into weekly enrollment targets. To meet their target, recruitment workers work evenings and weekends and make themselves available to meet eligible couples outside regular business hours. The program requires eligible couples to confirm their ability to attend one of the scheduled workshops before enrolling. Nearly all enrollments are completed in the couple's home. The Reading program is responsible for enrolling 60 percent of the Pennsylvania SHM program's total sample.

**SHM curriculum:** The Pennsylvania SHM program chose the PREP-based Within Our Reach curriculum primarily because of the Conference of Churches' past experience with facilitating relationship education workshops using both the PREP and Within My Reach curricula. All program staff, with the exception of office and newly hired recruitment staff, are required to complete the four-day Within Our Reach training when hired.

**Relationship and marriage education:** Relationship and marriage education workshops are offered on weeknights from 6:00 to 8:00 P.M. (with a meal offered at 5:30) and on Saturdays from 5:30 to 7:30 P.M. (with a meal offered at 5:00), and they run for 14 consecutive weeks. To encourage group cohesion, couples are expected to complete the workshop series with the same group they begin with. Couples who miss a workshop can make it up by meeting with facilitators 30 minutes before or after their next scheduled weekly workshop, and the majority of makeup sessions are completed by a facilitator. If a couple is unable to meet at this time, the facilitator or the family support coordinator meets with the couple one-on-one at their home to make up the session. The average group size for weeknight sessions is six to eight couples and for Saturday sessions is ten to twelve couples. The program begins new workshops once every month. All groups are led by a male-female facilitator pair.

**Family support:** Family support coordinators are expected to meet couples within two weeks of enrollment. Subsequent contact ranges from every two weeks to monthly, depending on how far the couple has progressed through the program and their level of need. Family support coordinators promote attendance at workshops and supplemental activities through phone calls and individual referrals to help couples address outside needs that may make participation difficult. Family support coordinators also coach couples one-on-one on specific curricular skills learned in workshops.

**Supplemental activities:** The program offers two supplemental activities each month. Typically held on Thursdays, supplemental activities are either educational or social in focus. Educational activities focus on topics of interest to program couples, such as immigration rights and public benefits. Social activities, like potluck picnics and sport competitions, are generally family-centered. Although socially oriented, these activities incorporate lessons taught in Within Our Reach to provide reinforcement of specific curricular skills. All couples are invited to supplemental activities. At every activity, recent workshop graduates are honored with certificates of completion and a modest incentive.

## **Participation Supports**

**Child care:** On-site child care is provided at all program activities. If couples are unable to use on-site child care services, limited funds are available to reimburse child care expenses.

**Transportation:** Taxi pickups and drop-offs are arranged or \$10 gas vouchers are given to all couples attending workshops. Taxi transportation is also provided for supplemental activities.

**Incentives:** Couples are given up to \$120 over the course of their 14-week workshop series, and they have opportunities to win such prizes as gift baskets in free raffles at the program's supplemental activities.

## Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

### Strong Families

**Host organization:** Family Answers. Family Answers partners with Community Prevention Partnership of Berks County in Reading (described above) to form the Pennsylvania SHM study site.

**Program name:** Strong Families

**Area population:** Of those living in the city of Bethlehem, 69 percent identify as white, 23 percent as Hispanic, and 4 percent as black or African-American. The median household income in the city of Bethlehem is \$43,524.

**Characteristics of participants enrolled through August 2008:** Of those enrolled in the Bethlehem program, 76 percent are Hispanic; 17 percent are white; and 6 percent identify as black or African-American. Eighty percent of families report incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line.

**Prior experience:** With over 100 years of service in their local community, Family Answers offers outpatient counseling, child abuse prevention, mental health, and family loan services to the wider Lehigh Valley area. The agency is also a founding member of the Lehigh Valley Healthy Marriage and Family Coalition.

**SHM program setting:** Unlike most other SHM programs, program services are delivered primarily in locations outside the Family Answers office. Because of space constraints, nearly all relationship and marriage education workshops and supplemental activities are conducted in rented church spaces. Because of poor availability of public transit, participants' work schedules, and an agency history of running home-visiting programs, nearly all enrollment appointments and one-on-one meetings with participants are completed in participants' homes.

**Staffing:** Staff providing SHM services are employees or contractors of Family Answers. Program supervisors and two staff were recruited from other programs within the agency. All other staff are new employees of Family Answers and have diverse professional backgrounds, with experience in social work, therapy and counseling, and human and preventive services. Currently, the program employs two full-time recruitment workers, three full-time family support coordinators, one full-time office manager, and one full-time logistics and supplemental activities coordinator. The program also contracts with seven relationship and marriage education facilitators.

## **SHM Program Operations**

**Management structure:** The Bethlehem SHM program has one program manager, who also acts as the family support and recruitment supervisor, and an assistant program manager, who oversees the relationship and marriage education component. The logistics coordinator is responsible for the supplemental activities component and for scheduling the workshops.

**Recruitment:** Family Answers recruits primarily from local churches and community events held in local hospitals and schools. Nearly all recruited couples hear about the program directly from the recruitment workers; referral partners rarely refer clients to the program. The Bethlehem program offers a modest incentive to participant couples who refer acquaintances, and the incentive is awarded after a referred couple successfully completes enrollment. Approximately 25 percent of couples have been referred in this way. Family Answers enrolls both English- and Spanish-speaking couples.

**Enrollment:** Recruitment workers also schedule and complete enrollment, which is usually done in the couple's home. The two-person recruitment team shares responsibility for reaching the program's weekly enrollment targets. In response to changing work schedules, recruitment workers schedule recruitment and enrollment meetings during and after regular business hours, including evenings and weekends. The Bethlehem program is responsible for enrolling 40 percent of the Pennsylvania SHM program's total sample.

**SHM curriculum:** The Family Answers program did not have prior experience with relationship and marriage education. It chose the PREP-based Within Our Reach curriculum because the Reading SHM program had prior experience with PREP. The program requires all family support staff and facilitators to complete the full four-day Within Our Reach training.

**Relationship and marriage education:** The program runs two to three workshops each week, on weeknights from 6:00 to 8:00 P.M. Workshops run for 14 consecutive weeks. In 2009, the program began offering a Saturday workshop from 10:00 A.M. to 1:30 P.M., which runs for seven consecutive weeks in an effort to reach couples who cannot attend on weekday evenings. The average workshop size is three to five couples, and the program launches new workshops every four to six weeks. To foster a sense of group unity, couples are expected to complete the workshop series with the same group they begin with. Couples who miss a series of workshops are rarely reassigned to other groups. Instead, facilitators or family support coordinators complete one-on-one makeup sessions with couples. Over time, this responsibility has shifted from family support coordinators to the workshop facilitators, because facilitators are more knowledgeable about the curriculum. Most makeup sessions are completed 30 minutes before or after a workshop. In general, the program alternates between operating workshops in English and Spanish, and workshops are usually led by a male-female pair of facilitators. Due to staff turnover among facilitators, workshops are occasionally led by a female-female pair.

**Family support:** Family support coordinators are expected to complete the first in-person meeting with couples within two weeks of enrollment. The frequency of subsequent in-person, one-on-one meetings with family support coordinators depends on an individual couple's needs and level of participation. To promote participation in program activities, family support coordinators call couples to remind them of workshops and supplemental activities, and they provide referrals to help couples address outside needs that may make participation difficult. During one-on-one meetings, family support coordinators also reinforce curricular skills learned in workshops and occasionally conduct makeup sessions with couples.

**Supplemental activities:** The program holds two supplemental activities each month. Most activities have both a social and educational component. The educational component focuses either on broader topics like parenting and accessing public benefits or on specific skills or techniques taught in the Within Our Reach curriculum. All couples are invited to attend supplemental activities.

## **Participation Supports**

**Child care:** On-site child care is provided by licensed child care workers at all program activities. If couples are unable to use on-site child care services and request assistance, they may be reimbursed for child care expenses.

**Transportation:** On request and with supervisor approval, \$10 gas vouchers or bus passes are available to couples who attend workshops.

**Incentives:** Couples are rewarded up to \$160 over the course of their 14-week workshop series and have chances to win such prizes as school supplies for children or themed gift baskets that are raffled off at supplemental activities.

## **El Paso, Texas**

### **Healthy Opportunities for Marriage Enrichment**

**Host organization:** El Paso Center for Children, working in partnership with the Texas Health and Human Service Commission, which acts as the lead agency overseeing the El Paso and San Antonio SHM sites

**Program name:** Healthy Opportunities for Marriage Enrichment (HOME). The El Paso HOME program forms an SHM study site together with the HOME program in San Antonio (described below).

**Area population:** Of all people living in the city of El Paso, 80 percent identify as Hispanic, 15 percent as white, and 3 percent as black or African-American. The median household income in the city of El Paso is \$38,412 per year.

**Characteristics of participants enrolled through August 2008:** Of the individuals enrolled in the El Paso HOME program, 97 percent identify as Hispanic, and 71 percent report being born outside the United States. Two percent of participants are white, and less than 1 percent identify as black or African-American. Eighty-seven percent of all families in the program report an income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line.

**Prior experience:** The El Paso Center for Children was founded in 1982 by the joining of two smaller organizations that had provided social services to homeless and disadvantaged youth since the 1920s. The agency provides a variety of family support programs and specialized services for runaway, homeless, and emotionally disturbed youth as well as teen mothers and their children. Prior to SHM, the El Paso Center for Children had not run relationship and marriage education workshops, but it saw the SHM program model as an opportunity to build on a family-based approach to helping local youth.

**SHM program setting:** In an effort to make the HOME program services convenient for couples to attend, the program in El Paso occupies two office spaces in different geographic areas of the city. Both offices are solely dedicated to providing SHM services. The smaller office is located in a small shopping center, while the other location occupies space in a larger office building across town that is also the base for most HOME staff. The majority of staff work in the larger location. Both offices provide the full range of SHM program services. Each location has a large workshop space, office or cubicle space for family support meetings and enrollment, and a room for child care. Both offices are decorated with advertisements for the program and testimonials from current and past SHM couples.

**Staffing:** The majority of program staff (other than workshop facilitators) work full time for the HOME program. A part-time lead workshop facilitator organizes logistics for the workshops and supervises facilitators. In addition, the program employs two recruitment workers, three family support workers, a receptionist, a supplemental activities coordinator, one part-time data entry specialist, and 12 contracted relationship and marriage education facilitators.

## **SHM Program Operations**

**Management structure:** In El Paso, the HOME program has one program manager who oversees all components of SHM service delivery. In addition, there is a supervisor for enrollment and family support services who is responsible for managing the activities of individual staff. The part-time lead facilitator supervises the facilitators and manages the schedule and logistics for relationship and marriage education workshops.

**Recruitment:** The HOME program relies on two main recruitment strategies: (1) making direct contact with potentially interested couples at community events and (2) mass media campaigns. The program recruits about half of all study participants from community and school events, and recruitment staff report spending approximately half their time out in the community talking directly with couples. The other half of participants contact the program directly, responding either to a referral from a couple already enrolled in the program or to media advertising. HOME's media outreach is supported by a public relations staff from the El Paso Center for Children who have broad contacts in the community and experience in running effective media campaigns. In an effort to saturate the community with information about the program, HOME strategically times the placement of ads on billboards and in local newspapers with radio spots and appearances on local public television stations.

**Enrollment:** Recruitment workers are responsible for recruiting couples and completing the enrollment process. After making initial contact with couples, recruitment workers call couples to schedule an enrollment appointment. Staff vary their schedules to include evenings and weekends so they are available to meet with couples outside regular work hours. The El Paso program is responsible for enrolling 400 of the 800 SHM study couples in Texas, and the San Antonio program (described below) is responsible for the other 400 couples.

**SHM curriculum:** The Texas Health and Human Service Commission chose PREP's Within Our Reach curriculum because of its foundation in empirical research evidence.

**Relationship and marriage education:** The El Paso HOME program holds workshops on weeknights Monday through Thursday with two-hour sessions taking place from 6 to 8 P.M. over a fifteen 15-week period. To the extent possible, couples complete the curriculum with the same workshop group they begin with. If a couple misses a workshop, they have the opportuni-

ty to make it up in individual meetings with their family support coordinator. Workshops range from about 10 to 15 couples per workshop session, and the program begins one new workshop series each month. The majority of workshops are conducted in Spanish, and all workshops are facilitated by a male-female team.

**Family support:** Family support coordinators are all paraprofessionals with some background in social services. Family support workers aim to meet with couples within one week of their enrollment in the program, and they continue to meet with a couple weekly until they begin their relationship and marriage education workshop. Couples are encouraged to meet with their family support coordinators every two weeks while they are in the relationship and marriage education workshops, and then they meet monthly after they have completed all workshop sessions. The supervisor for family support services meets with staff weekly to discuss the status of individual couples.

**Supplemental activities:** The HOME program hosts approximately three supplemental activities each month, offering both educational and social events that are open to all couples enrolled in the program. Relationship and marriage education facilitators and speakers from the community make presentations during most supplemental activities, discussing topics like step-parenting and building peer support networks. A particularly popular activity is the parenting booster, which is a series of discussions and presentations about parenting young children and teens and has covered topics ranging from sex education to nutrition. All activities occur in one of the two offices of the El Paso Center for Children. Some events — like gender-specific activities and reunion sessions for couples who were in the same relationship and marriage education workshop — are only offered to a subset of enrollees.

## Participation Supports

**Child care:** Child care is provided on-site for children under age 18 during workshops, supplemental activities, and meetings with family support coordinators. If couples prefer not to use on-site care, they can request a \$15 reimbursement per workshop to defray the cost of child care.

**Transportation:** On request to their family support coordinator, couples who attend HOME program activities are eligible to receive a \$10 gas card to cover transportation costs to and from the program's offices.

**Incentives:** The HOME program awards prizes to couples who have perfect workshop attendance. In addition, there are occasional free raffles at supplemental activities. Couples who refer another couple to the program have additional chances to win prizes during raffle drawings.

## **San Antonio, Texas**

### **Healthy Opportunities for Marriage Enrichment**

**Host organization:** Family Service Association, working in partnership with the Texas Health and Human Service Commission, which acts as the lead agency overseeing the El Paso and San Antonio SHM sites

**Program name:** Healthy Opportunities for Marriage Enrichment (HOME). The San Antonio HOME program forms an SHM study site together with the HOME program of El Paso (described above).

**Area population:** Of people living in El Paso, 61 percent identify as Hispanic, 29 percent as white, and 6 percent as black or African-American. The median household income in the city San Antonio is \$42,217.

**Characteristics of participants enrolled through August 2008:** Among those enrolled in the San Antonio program, 91 percent are Hispanic, 5 percent are white, and 2 percent are black or African-American. Eighty-seven percent of families enrolled in San Antonio are at or below 200 percent of the poverty line.

**Prior experience:** Family Service Association has provided a wide range of social services to the San Antonio area for over 100 years. Initially an agency that provided financial assistance to families, Family Service Association now offers programs that seek to improve family wellness, including parent education programs; individual, marital, and family counseling; home care for seniors; and information and referral services. The organization views the HOME program, with its focus on couple relationships, as a natural extension of the agency's work on strengthening parent-child relationships.

**SHM program setting:** HOME occupies a section of a former elementary school converted into a "one-stop" community service center called the Neighborhood Place. Staff occupy two former classroom spaces, and program services take place throughout the Neighborhood Place. Two separate workshop spaces are decorated to resemble a home — furnished with love seats, pillows, and throws and decorated with warm, gender-neutral colors and marriage-focused pictures and framed sayings in both English and Spanish. This same motif carries over to a separate dining area where couples share a meal before their workshops. Two child care spaces are available, one designed as a preschool room for younger children and another with computers, video games, a television, and arts and crafts for older children and teenagers. For larger program activities, HOME uses the Neighborhood Place's auditorium.

**Staffing:** HOME's management team was hired from within existing Family Service Association programs. Staff were intentionally chosen to reflect the program's target population and high percentage of Hispanic families. Most staff are bilingual in Spanish and English and are primarily of Hispanic descent. Currently, the program employs two full-time recruitment workers, four full-time family support coordinators, one full-time administrative assistant, and six contracted relationship and marriage education facilitators.

## **SHM Program Operations**

**Management structure:** HOME has one full-time and one part-time program manager and two full-time supervisors. One supervisor oversees the recruitment and family support components, and another oversees logistics for workshops and supplemental activities.

**Recruitment:** HOME recruitment efforts benefit largely from Family Service Association's long history in the San Antonio area and from the trust it has built with community residents and local organizations. Recruitment workers maintain professional relationships with organizations that they have worked with in the past and, at times, have built on these relationships to expand HOME's referral network. The program recruits from a range of sources — Head Start programs, churches, and community events — and, most recently, through mass media efforts, including radio and newspaper advertisements. HOME offers a modest incentive to enrolled couples for referring other couples who complete enrollment. Nearly one-third of enrolled couples have been referred to the program in this way. HOME recruits both English- and Spanish-speaking couples.

**Enrollment:** Recruitment workers are each expected to enroll five couples every week. To reach this target, they try to generate 15 new referrals each week. Recruitment workers also complete enrollments during evenings and weekends. The San Antonio program is responsible for enrolling 400 of the 800 SHM study couples in Texas, and the El Paso program (described above) is responsible for the other 400 couples.

**SHM curriculum:** The Texas Health and Human Service Commission chose PREP's Within Our Reach curriculum because of its foundation in empirical research evidence.

**Relationship and marriage education:** HOME runs three or four relationship and marriage education workshops on weeknights from 6:30 to 8:30 P.M. Workshops run for 15 consecutive weeks. Although couples are encouraged to attend all workshops with the same group, if a couple misses three or more workshops in a row, the couple is removed from the current group and is invited to start again with a new workshop series. If couples miss one workshop, they are able to do a one-on-one makeup session with their family support coordinator. Workshop size ranges from 10 to 12 couples. To ensure that newly enrolled couples are quickly engaged, new

workshops begin every four to five weeks, alternating between English- and Spanish-language workshops. Male-female pairs lead all workshops.

**Family support:** Family support coordinators generally meet with couples within two weeks after enrollment. Subsequent contact ranges from every two weeks to monthly, depending on level of need and how far the couple has progressed through the program. To help structure the staff's workweek, the supervisor expects each family support coordinator to complete 10 one-on-one meetings with couples each week. To encourage ongoing participation in program activities, family support coordinators maintain frequent contact with couples by phone, to remind them of upcoming activities. Family support coordinators also provide referrals to community services to address any barriers to participation. During their one-on-one meetings, family support coordinators also work with couples to practice Within Our Reach curricular skills.

**Supplemental activities:** HOME offers three or four supplemental activities every month. Activities include orientation sessions for newly enrolled couples, at which couples are given an opportunity to see the program space and meet with currently enrolled couples; informational sessions that focus on topics like budgeting and child health; reunion sessions that bring couples back together after completing their workshops; and a series of date nights using the Ten Great Dates curriculum (the program uses nine of the dates). Attendance in certain activities is restricted to couples who have completed their workshops, although other activities are open to all couples enrolled in the program.

## **Participation Supports**

**Child care:** On-site child care is provided for any program activity scheduled at the Neighborhood Place.

**Transportation:** To compensate for transportation costs to workshops or supplemental activities, couples can request gas cards, taxi vouchers, or bus passes valued up to \$10. After any one-on-one meeting with family support coordinators, couples receive a \$20 gas card.

**Incentives:** Couples receive a point for each of the 15 workshops they attend. Each point is worth \$10 and can be cashed in upon completing the workshops.

## Seattle, Washington

### Becoming Parents Program

**Host organization:** Becoming Parents Program (BPP)

**Program name:** Becoming Parents Program

**Area population:** The majority of individuals in Seattle — 69 percent — identify as white. The remaining population is 13 percent Asian, 8 percent black or African-American, and 6 percent Hispanic. The median household income in the city of Seattle is \$56,319.

**Characteristics of participants enrolled through August 2008:** The couples recruited by BPP are young, relative to the other SHM sites; the average participant is 27 years old. Of the participants BPP has enrolled in the study, 52 percent identify as white, 22 percent as Hispanic, and 18 percent as black or African-American. Seventy-three percent of families report a household income at or below 200 percent of the poverty line.

**Prior experience:** In the early 1990s, Pamela Jordan adapted the PREP curriculum for parents expecting the birth of a child. In 2002, after a number of pilot studies, Jordan received a grant from the National Institutes of Health to study the effectiveness of the BPP curriculum with married, first-time parents.<sup>9</sup> In 2005, BPP began operating as a private business that trains new facilitators and agency staff in the Becoming Parents curriculum, and it offers quarterly fee-for-service workshops attended by middle- and upper-class expectant couples. BPP was also chosen as a curriculum for the Family Expectations program in Oklahoma City and for the programs participating in the Building Strong Families evaluation, also funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

**SHM program setting:** Located in the Capitol Hill neighborhood near downtown Seattle, the program occupies an office solely dedicated to SHM program activities. The space comprises one large room used for workshops and supplemental activities, a conference room, offices for supervisory staff, and a private room for intake. Family support coordinators work in a space adjacent to the workshop room and use the conference room for one-on-one meetings. The office waiting area is designed like a small living room and has a couch, armchairs, bookshelves, and colorful books and toys for children. The space is painted in soothing green colors, and plants are scattered throughout. It includes a small kitchen where couples are offered complimentary tea, coffee, and snacks.

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<sup>9</sup>Results from the NIH study of Becoming Parents have not yet been published.

**Staffing:** This program is unique among SHM sites in that the majority of staff at BPP are nurses — a preference of the curriculum developer, as many sessions include information on prenatal and infant care. In addition, this program has combined the roles of workshop facilitator and family support coordinator. These staff generally work full time for the program, and the program employs six full-time and one part-time family support coordinators/facilitators. Three recruitment staff do not have nursing backgrounds, and an assistant greets visitors and helps with office management.

## **SHM Program Operations**

**Management structure:** BPP has a single program manager who oversees all operations, one supervisor for family support services and relationship and marriage education workshops, a supervisor of operations, and another supervisor for recruitment. The recruitment supervisor also oversees supplemental activities.

**Recruitment:** Eligible couples must be expecting a baby or must recently have had a child. The program recruits the majority of couples from public health clinics and from Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) centers in the greater Seattle area. The program relies primarily on partner agencies to refer clients to BPP, but recruitment workers also sometimes speak directly with potential participants at the clinics. To diversify recruitment sources, the program has begun recruiting at community events and posting ads on free Internet Web sites.

**Enrollment:** The supervisor for recruitment sets a goal for staff of enrolling an average of 37 couples each month. Recruitment staff work evening and weekend hours to accommodate the schedules of potential study participants. Once a couple enrolls in the program, a family support coordinator is quickly assigned to begin working with the family.

**SHM curriculum:** BPP uses a version of the Becoming Parents Program curriculum that has been adapted for use with low-income couples.

**Relationship and marriage education:** All relationship and marriage education workshops are held on-site in the large meeting area at the center of BPP's office space. Groups are facilitated by female-female or female-male teams. Couples can complete the 24-hour curriculum by attending either nine consecutive Saturday sessions from 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. or nine consecutive weeknight sessions from 6:15 to 9:00 P.M. Couples who miss a workshop can make it up by attending a one-on-one session with their family support coordinator or by attending that workshop in another series. The average workshop size for both weeknight and Saturday sessions is about eight couples, and the program begins about two new workshops per month. Partly because all participants are either pregnant or have a new baby, there are often changes in

couples' availability, and many couples switch from one workshop series to another during their time in the program.

**Family support:** The program managers view nursing backgrounds as optimal training for addressing the complex needs of expectant parents; therefore, all family support coordinators/facilitators are nurses. The program manager sets goals for how often staff should meet with couples. Family support coordinators are expected to meet with couples on their caseloads within one week of their enrollment in the study, every two weeks until they have completed the relationship and marriage education workshops, and monthly for the duration of the program. Family support coordinators spend a significant amount of time addressing employment needs and connecting participants to job and other community resources.

**Supplemental activities:** Supplemental activities are organized by the recruitment supervisor and are typically run by the family support coordinators/facilitators. The program offers "reunion" boosters, "Knowledge Is Power" educational events that include such topics as finances and careers, and social events like a picnic or a family activity day. All couples in the program are invited to each supplemental activity, regardless of where they are in completing the relationship and marriage education curriculum.

## **Participation Supports**

**Child care:** Participants receive reimbursement at \$8 per hour for child care costs, inclusive of travel time to and from the program, if needed. These funds are available for meetings, workshops, and supplemental activities.

**Transportation:** Transportation assistance is provided as needed to couples who request it. The program provides \$7 gas vouchers per program activity, and couples who do not have access to a car can request taxi vouchers or bus tickets.

**Incentives:** To encourage participation in workshops, the program provides couples with gift cards and gifts for their babies after they attend a certain number of successive workshops. Couples who attend a minimum number of sessions are also included in ongoing free raffles for such prizes as baby pictures or cash payments for a "family day out." Incentives are also given for participation in supplemental activities, including raffle prizes and other small gifts for the family, such as a home safety kit or gourmet dinner kit. Couples are eligible for \$50 gift cards for attendance at four educational activities.

# Shoreline, Washington

## Loving Families

**Host organization:** The Center for Human Services

**Program name:** Loving Families

**Area population:** In Shoreline, 72 percent of people identify as white, 14 percent as Asian, 6 percent as Hispanic, and 4 percent as black or African-American. The median household income in the city of Shoreline is \$61,238.

**Characteristics of participants enrolled through August 2008:** The program enrolls a population that is lower in income and more heavily Hispanic than the area's general population. Twenty eight percent of couples enrolled by the program identify as Hispanic, while 50 percent identify as white and 10 percent as black or African-American. Fifty-eight percent of enrolled couples report income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line.

**Prior experience:** The Center for Human Services is a community-based nonprofit organization established in 1970 that provides family support services, family counseling, and substance abuse treatment. The agency had not offered relationship and marriage education prior to SHM, though it built on a long history and experience providing preventive education and other services to children and their parents. The Center for Human Services has operated parenting classes, adult literacy classes, early childhood education, out-of-school activities, home-visiting programs, and family/cultural events. Its family counseling program provides mental health, anger management, and juvenile intervention services from a strengths-based perspective.

**SHM program setting:** Loving Families began SHM operations in Shoreline for English-speaking families in August 2007 and for Spanish-speaking families at a second location in the nearby city of Bothell in April 2008. The family centers where Loving Families program activities are located are designed to be welcoming spaces where diverse members of the community can feel at home. Comfortable reception and community resource room areas are brightly decorated and offer resource information in a variety of languages. Toys are available for children, as are complimentary coffee and tea for the parents. The Center for Human Services strives for all children and adults to see themselves reflected in the pictures and resource materials found in the centers. Families can access newspapers and magazines, computers, and a phone/fax/copier.

**Staffing:** Loving Families has a large complement of staff relative to most other SHM programs, owing in part to offering SHM in two separate locations in the community. Loving Families employs four full-time recruitment workers, six family support coordinators (four full-time and two part-time), six relationship and marriage education facilitators (two full-time and four

part-time), a full-time operations manager who is chiefly responsible for coordinating supplemental activities, and two part-time quality improvement coordinator/data entry specialists.

## **SHM Program Operations**

**Management structure:** A program manager oversees the entire program and manages relationship and marriage education workshops. One supervisor manages recruitment and enrollment. A clinical supervisor manages family support services. To assist in managing workshops, family support, and supplemental activities, Loving Families has designated two coordinator positions. These positions do not supervise staff but help train new staff and provide planning and logistical support.

**Recruitment:** Loving Families recruits participants primarily from public health offices in King and Snohomish Counties, many of which house Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) programs. Other programs at the Center for Human Services also refer couples to Loving Families, and a substantial number of referrals come from current participants. The program was granted permission to station recruitment staff in the waiting areas of several public health or WIC offices, where they talk directly with potential participants. Two recruitment workers are bilingual and focus on recruiting for Spanish-language services, while the other two recruitment staff members focus on recruitment of English-speaking couples. Recruitment workers are responsible for promoting the program both to referral partners and to couples. They screen couples for eligibility and complete the enrollment process and paperwork.

**Enrollment:** The recruitment supervisor uses a highly structured, performance-based approach to managing the four full-time recruiters. All recruitment workers are assigned weekly and monthly goals for the number of couples they are to enroll, and the recruitment supervisor meets frequently with the team to monitor progress, provide guidance on specific challenges, and support staff with continued training. The program keeps an ongoing list of couples who have expressed interest in the program, and the recruitment supervisor assigns workers responsibility for following up with specific couples, with the goal of enrolling them in the study. Staff work varied schedules so that they are available during evening and weekend hours, when working families are more likely to be available.

**SHM curriculum:** The program uses the Loving Couples, Loving Children (LCLC) curriculum developed by John Gottman. Prior to the SHM study, the Center for Human Services had begun developing a relationship with the LCLC curriculum developers and was interested in incorporating the curriculum into its services. The agency felt that the content and format of the LCLC curriculum was in line with its values and skill set. In addition to teaching specific relationship skills, the discussion-based format of the curriculum encourages couples to share and

learn from one another, which appealed to the agency's managers, given their strengths-based counseling orientation.

**Relationship and marriage education:** Loving Families offers group workshops on weekday evenings and Saturdays in English at the Shoreline location and in Spanish at the Bothell location. Groups are held on weekdays from 6:30 to 8:30 P.M. and in two-hour sessions on Saturdays that begin at either 10 A.M. or 12 or 2 P.M., over a period of 12 weeks. If couples miss a workshop, they may attend a one-on-one makeup sessions with their family support coordinator. Loving Families tries to keep couples in the same workshop series as consistently as possible over the 12 weeks to promote group cohesion, but couples who do not attend the first three consecutive sessions are reassigned to a future group. Workshop size ranges from 7 to 15 couples, and each group is facilitated by a male-female pair.

**Family support:** One unique aspect of the program's family support component is that family support coordinators use the LCLC relationship inventory.<sup>10</sup> This questionnaire about the couple's relationship is structured to emphasize core concepts in the workshop curriculum, and it is designed to help family support staff begin a discussion with couples about areas of strength and growth in their relationship. Family support coordinators meet with couples every other week when they are first enrolled in the program, monthly after a couple is in the program for three months, and quarterly for the last few months of program participation. Additionally, to help address barriers to participation, family support coordinators make referrals to the Center for Human Services and to other community resources.

**Supplemental activities:** Loving Families offers three types of supplemental activities: curriculum booster sessions, date nights, and quarterly family activities. The program aims to offer four booster sessions per month in which LCLC curriculum modules, covering supplementary topics, are provided in the same format as the core relationship and marriage education workshops. During date nights, the program provides child care while couples go out to eat together and practice a curriculum activity one-on-one. Quarterly family activities are opportunities for all families in the program to spend time together in a relaxed and fun setting. For example, Loving Families hosts a family dinner during which couples practice skills by playing "marriage bingo."

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<sup>10</sup>Loving Couples Loving Children (2008).

## **Participation Supports**

**Child care:** During workshops and supplemental activities, child care is provided at the Center for Human Services for children older than age 1. The program reimburses families for child care costs for infants and for children with special needs.

**Transportation supports:** Gas cards or bus passes are provided to all couples for enrollment, workshops, family support meetings, and supplemental activities. Gas cards vary in amount from \$5 to \$10, depending on the distance couples must travel.

**Incentives:** To encourage attendance at workshops, Loving Families provides such incentives as gift cards or cash at six of the twelve workshops. At the other six workshops, staff raffle off a prize to the couples in attendance, such as movie tickets that were donated to the agency. Couples also receive gift certificates ranging from \$15 to \$30 for attending family support coordinator meetings, given after the third, sixth, ninth, eleventh, and twelfth meetings are completed.

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2009. Working Paper. David J. Fein.

*Designing a Marriage Education Demonstration and Evaluation for Low-Income Married Couples.*  
2008. Working Paper. Virginia Knox and David J. Fein.

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