



## HEALTHY MARRIAGE INITIATIVE



Building Real Solutions  
for Real People



Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families

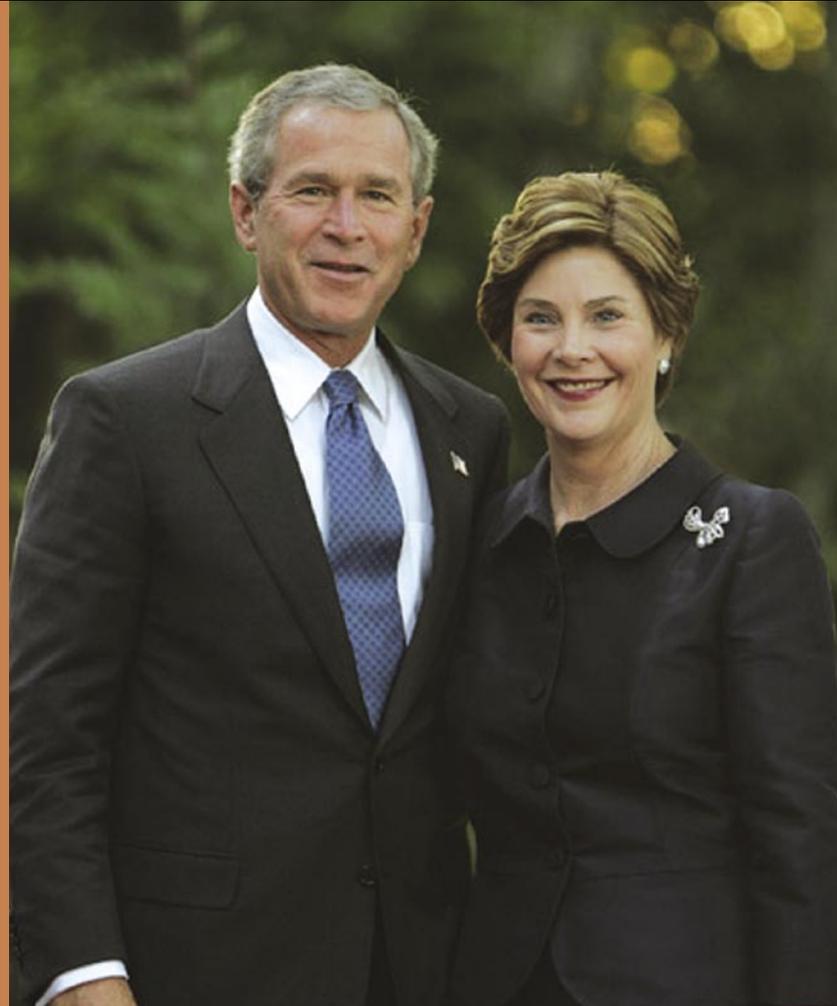


“To encourage marriage and promote the well-being of children, I have proposed a healthy marriage initiative to help couples develop the skills and knowledge to form and sustain healthy marriages. Research has shown that, on average, children raised in households headed by married parents fare better than children who grow up in other family structures.

## PRESIDENT GEORGE W. AND FIRST LADY LAURA BUSH

Through education and counseling programs, faith-based, community, and government organizations promote healthy marriages and a better quality of life for children. By supporting responsible child-rearing and strong families, my Administration is seeking to ensure that every child can grow up in a safe and loving home.”

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH





## MAKING HAPPILY EVER AFTERS HAPPEN

### **ACF Efforts Have Empowered More Than 100 Programs in Five Key Areas:**

- Services and Support for Married and Engaged Couples
- Services for Non-Married Parents
- Specialized Strategies for Unique Populations
- Public Awareness and Resources
- Growing New Leaders for the Future

In fairy tales, healthy marriages are easy. They seem to require only the right size glass slipper or a prince charming on horseback. In reality, healthy marriages don't just happen. They take work and commitment from both spouses. They also require an ability to weather the conflicts and challenges that occur throughout a lifelong partnership. Across the nation, hundreds of government agencies and community and faith-based groups are striving every day to provide real people with the tools, techniques, and skills they need to build healthy marriages in their own unique circumstances.

## *What Is the Healthy Marriage Initiative?*

In 2002, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services launched the Healthy Marriage Initiative. ACF designed the initiative to support President Bush's goal of increasing healthy marriages by focusing attention and action on strengthening marriages and preparing interested individuals and couples for healthy marriages. Through the initiative, ACF seeks to improve the well-being of children and families by funding and facilitating the provision of marriage strengthening services to families already receiving help from other ACF programs, as well as by supporting the development of community-wide initiatives that involve many different types of organizations interested in taking steps to increase healthy marriage.

Using grants from ACF, these organizations have helped thousands of people learn what it takes to build a successful marriage. This publication showcases some of the programs that organizations have developed using ACF grants and demonstrates how these programs are helping to create successful marital partnerships. This publication also provides insight into some of the lessons learned along the way that other agencies and organizations can use to promote healthy marriages in their communities.

For more information about the Healthy Marriage Initiative, including future funding opportunities for organizations interested in promoting healthy marriages, visit <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage>.

## *Why Are Healthy Marriages Important?*

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 90 percent of all Americans will marry someday. Virtually all of these people aspire to the same thing: a happy, healthy, lifelong marriage. The reason they aspire to this, quite simply, is because healthy marriages make a difference for everyone—individuals, children, and communities.

**Individuals:** Researchers have found many benefits for individuals who are in healthy marriages. For example, most men and women in healthy marriages:

- Live longer,
- Have better mental and physical health,
- Report being happier, and
- Have higher incomes and build more wealth.

**Children:** Healthy marriages are the cornerstones of family life. They also are considered the ideal environment in which to raise children. Children raised in healthy marriages are more likely to grow into strong, healthy, and successful adults.

“We don't have all the data yet, but in my heart I know there is a little boy out there whose parents were helped and whose family is stronger because of the Healthy Families Nampa grant. I know the collaboration that is occurring because of this project. We are preventing problems and community spirit is growing.”

Brenda Freeman  
Director  
Families, Etc.

“Healthy marriages contribute to the common good.”

Dr. Wade Horn  
Assistant Secretary of the  
Administration for Children  
and Families

“Our emphasis is on healthy marriages that provide a strong and stable environment for raising children. It is about helping couples who choose marriage for themselves gain access to the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages.”

Dr. Wade Horn  
Assistant Secretary of the  
Administration for Children and  
Families

“The ACF grant gave the agency the capacity to expand its services to include marriage education. Marriage education is a totally new service for the agency.”

Sheila Spears  
Southeastern Louisiana University  
Project Director  
Louisiana Healthy Marriage  
Knapsack Project

Children raised in a healthy marriage also are:

- More likely to attend college,
- More likely to succeed academically,
- Less likely to engage in delinquent behaviors or abuse drugs and alcohol, and
- Less likely to divorce when they get married.

**Communities:** Communities are strong when families are strong and marriages are healthy. The many benefits for communities that have higher percentages of couples in healthy marriages include:

- Higher rates of physically and emotionally healthy citizens,
- Higher rates of educated citizens,
- Lower crime statistics, and
- Less need for social services.

These are just a few of the reasons why healthy marriages are so important and why providing programs that support healthy marriages is worth the effort.

## *What Is a Healthy Marriage?*

Although every marriage is different, a *healthy* marriage is easy to spot. It is a marriage that is built on a foundation where both spouses feel mutually enriched and have a deep respect for one another. A healthy marriage also is defined by the commitment from both spouses to ongoing growth and the ability to communicate and effectively resolve conflict. Managing conflict marks the difference between couples who stay married and those who do not.

## *How Do You Build a Healthy Marriage?*

Healthy marriages come in all shapes and sizes. Regardless of how marriages look on the outside, they all rely on their strong foundations to keep them stable. Even if a marriage has a strong foundation though, “happily ever after” does not just happen. Every marriage has its own conflicts and challenges, and no marriage comes with an instruction book or fairy godmother to encourage a happy ending. That is why building a healthy marriage takes effort and dedication from both spouses. However, just as fairy tale princesses can learn secret spells and wave magic wands to live happily ever after, individuals and couples can acquire the necessary skills to build healthy marriages.



## SUPPORT FOR MARRIED AND ENGAGED COUPLES

### *Once Upon A Time...*

**A**n engaged couple began to plan their new life together. Both partners were from different backgrounds and family structures, and certain issues seemed to recur in their discussions. The partners recognized that they each had different communication styles and could use some help in managing conflicts.

*To build a healthy marriage, both partners knew they needed information on how to communicate with one another.*

A healthy marriage doesn't happen without the work and commitment of both partners. Over the past several years, ACF has provided grants to several organizations that **provide support and services designed to teach married and engaged couples** the skills they need to have a healthy marriage. Most of these organizations do not provide counseling or therapy, and they have shown that licensed professionals and expensive sessions are not always necessary to teach people what they need to know about marriage. Instead, many of the programs are led by regular people and are provided to couples for free or at low cost.

“The most beneficial part of the program was learning how to blend our two families and how to listen to one another...The most important thing was the support and guidance of other families that have been through these same things.”

Brian and Christina  
Family Night Out Series Participants



## The Bottom Line

Marriage skills can be learned. One way couples can do this is in a community setting from people just like themselves. For example, ACF grants for services and support for couples have led to the following:

- More than 500 people in South Carolina learned about healthy marriage resources through Heritage Community Services.
- More than 75 faith- or community-based organizations participated in Heritage Community Services' marriage education and preparation experiences.
- Heritage Community Services has trained at least 120 couples as marriage mentors.
- As part of the Healthy Marriage Knapsack Project, staff members at nearly 30 Family Resource Centers have received training on how to deliver marriage education services, and nearly 150 couples have received these services.

Through these programs, ACF helps both married and engaged couples learn better ways to communicate, manage expectations, and develop productive ways of handling conflict, all of which contribute to successful marriages. In programs for engaged couples, participants learn to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their relationships before getting married, set realistic future expectations, and highlight the types of issues that will need particular attention in the future to create a strong partnership. Examples of such programs are described below.

## *Ideas in Action*

### **Healthy Marriage Knapsack Project**

In Louisiana, organizers of the Healthy Marriage Knapsack Project are increasing the capacity of local Family Resource Centers by training staff members to become marriage education facilitators. These facilitators then work in groups to teach marriage skills to couples. To ensure that the facilitators are prepared to help all types of families, the marriage education curricula developed for the project have been adapted for use with multiple family structures.

### **Heritage Community Services**

By collaborating with local churches and faith- and community-based organizations, South Carolina's Heritage Community Services works to identify married couples in long-term, healthy marriages to serve as mentors to other married couples. Mentor couples then receive training on specific strategies that can help nurture the development of other married couples' relationships. Mentors also work with engaged couples to complete a relationship inventory, which serves as the basis for ongoing support sessions between the mentors and the couples.

### **Marriage Investors—United Way of Johnson County**

In Johnson County, Indiana, couples can participate in Family Night Out, a program organized through the Marriage Investors program. This weekly event provides couples with an opportunity to network with other couples and learn relationship, parenting, and financial management skills. Dinner and child care are provided. Marriage Investors also helps facilitate agreements with local counselors and faith-based organizations that commit to helping couples through premarital and marriage counseling and mentoring.



## SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR NON-MARRIED PARENTS

### *Once Upon A Time...*

**A** young, non-married couple had a child together. While the couple took care of their new baby, they began to contemplate marriage, and started asking questions about what they could do to succeed in marriage.

*If we marry, how would we maintain a healthy relationship while caring for our small child? Would our decision to marry or not marry affect our child?*

Many non-married parents want to learn more about what it takes to have a healthy marriage, and many of these couples and individuals express an interest and intent to eventually marry. ACF, therefore, has given grants to several organizations with programs designed to provide **support and services for non-married parents** who want to prepare for marriage.

A key strategy of these programs is helping non-married parents develop the skills necessary to form and maintain a healthy marriage, if they choose to be married. These programs also help couples improve the communication and conflict resolution skills necessary to create optimal co-parenting situations. In addition, some grantees have developed specialized ways of helping unmarried couples think more about marriage.

“We’ve been to other programs that helped us with the baby and that’s great. But this is the first time we’ve gotten to talk about us and how we get along and how we can be strong together. We know working on that is really good for the baby too.”

Participant from Mobile, Alabama  
Family Connection Program



## The Bottom Line

Although some parents may choose not to marry, they still are interested in acquiring the skills necessary to form a strong relationship and be good co-parents. Many of these individuals are eager to participate in programs adapted from existing marriage education curricula. For example,

- More than 130 people completed the Family Connections program in Alabama during its pilot phase. After completing the program, participants demonstrated improved problem-solving skills, less stress, and better relationship function and quality. Many participants wished they could go back for more.
- More than 800 people have participated in Michigan's Healthy Marriages/Healthy Relationships program.
- More than 430 people have received marriage education through Idaho's Healthy Families Nampa project. These services have impacted the lives of more than 1,000 children. In addition, more than 50 facilitators have been trained, including 7 bilingual facilitators.

## *Ideas in Action*

### **Family Connections—The State of Alabama Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board/The Children's Trust Fund**

In Alabama, the Family Connections program works with low-income, mostly African-American mothers and fathers to teach individual, relationship, and decision-making skills and help parents understand the importance of two-parent involvement and healthy marriages. In addition, participants in the program learn practical skills to manage stress, communicate, and listen. Family Connections also helps people recognize abusive relationships, navigate stepparent relationships, and work through co-parenting issues with former partners. Phase II of the Family Connections program, which will begin in 2006 in Huntsville, will serve African-American and Hispanic couples. The impacts of Phase II will be documented over a 3-year period.

### **Healthy Families Nampa**

Through the paternity establishment program used in the local hospital and by other community partners, Healthy Families Nampa targets new parents and encourages the signing of a paternity acknowledgment. They also provide new parents with the opportunity to learn the skills necessary for a healthy marriage, should they choose to marry. Faith- and community-based providers offer several other services to encourage positive parenting. The project also sponsors community events to promote healthy marriage and parenting. In addition, Healthy Families Nampa has undertaken special projects to target vulnerable and at-risk populations. For example, they provide classes in Spanish and have community partners that provide services through the Head Start program and Crisis Pregnancy Center. They also offer targeted services to incarcerated parents.

### **Healthy Marriages/Healthy Relationships—Grand Rapids**

Working with partners at 10 organizations, the Healthy Marriages/Healthy Relationships project provides family wellness, parenting, and marriage education classes to low-income parents in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Community- and faith-based organizations work with a local coalition, Healthy Marriages Grand Rapids, to deliver these services. Interested parents are recruited through the neighborhoods and human service organizations. The goal of the Healthy Marriages/Healthy Relationships project is to strengthen the relationships between parents in order to improve the well-being of their children. The majority of the participants are African-American and Latino parents who have not had access to relationship skills training.



## SPECIALIZED STRATEGIES FOR UNIQUE POPULATIONS

### *Once Upon A Time...*

**A** couple moved to the United States from another country seeking a different life. Once they arrived, however, the couple was under tremendous stress, arguing more and communicating less, which only increased their anxiety as they adjusted to their new life.

*The couple considered counseling and heard about marriage education classes, but they knew that the benefits would come from a program that considered their unique needs as a new family in this country.*

While every marriage can benefit from general healthy marriage programs, some couples face more challenging situations, such as becoming adoptive parents, raising a child with special needs, or becoming displaced from their homes, that require more customized services. Other couples may need marriage education strategies designed from a different cultural perspective that account for diverse customs and values.

“Coming to the healthy marriage class taught us to communicate better. We liked the class very much. We are now a happy family.”

Kheun Kuoy and Peav Reun  
Jewish Family and Community  
Services of Chicago  
Program Participants



## The Bottom Line

The organizations that have received ACF grants for programs for unique populations demonstrate that effective communication and conflict resolution transcend culture and language as tools to strengthen marriages. For example:

- 96 percent of participants from Bethany Christian Services learned new skills to help their marriages.
- 92 percent of participants from Bethany Christian Services reported a change in the way they look at their relationships.
- 4,000 individuals and couples have completed the Chickasaw Nation's relationship enhancement training.
- Many refugee communities (approximately 15 so far) now are able to access culturally appropriate marriage education services because of the efforts of HIAS Affiliate Jewish Family Services and its partners. HIAS Affiliate Jewish Family Services modified curricula to be culturally sensitive, trained trainers from refugee organizations, and have translated some materials into several languages, including Arabic, Bosnian, Farsi, French, and Russian.

Because these special situations require a more tailored approach, ACF distributes grants to organizations that offer **specialized strategies for unique populations**. Since receiving these grants, many of the grantees have made a difference in serving populations with unique challenges.

## *Ideas in Action*

### **Bethany Christian Services**

In Atlanta, Bethany Christian Services developed a specialized marriage education curriculum that is geared specifically toward the needs of adoptive parents, including parents that adopt older or special needs children. In particular, this program offers overnight classes for couples to learn techniques and skills to strengthen their marriages.

### **Chickasaw Nation**

This organization customized a mainstream marriage education curriculum to the customs, traditions, and values of the Chickasaw Nation. In addition, marriage education has become part of the training provided to all Tribal employees. In this way, marriage education is helping improve the overall well-being of children and families and helping members of the Chickasaw Nation learn communication and conflict resolution skills that they can use in other areas of life.

### **HIAS Affiliate Jewish Family Services**

HIAS Affiliate Jewish Family Services works specifically with refugee populations to teach them important marriage and family education skills. Participants work through a specialized curriculum that has been adapted for a wide range of refugee populations, including Bosnians, Cambodians, Chinese, Vietnamese, Ethiopians, and other Pan-Africans. Operated at multiple sites across the United States, this program teaches marriage education and relationship skills that participants can use in other types of relationships developed during the resettling process.



## PUBLIC AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

### *Once Upon A Time...*

**T**here was a young, married couple with two children who was trying to adopt a third child in foster care. The couple knew that taking marriage education and parenting classes would increase their chances of adoption.

*Where could the couple turn? How could they learn about what resources were available in the community?*

Real people want real information on how they can improve their families and relationships. The challenge for service providers, however, is finding the most appropriate communication channels to ensure that every person searching for marriage education services can find the information they need. To help overcome this challenge, ACF has provided healthy marriage grants to several organizations that have undertaken efforts to **increase public awareness and improve community resources about healthy marriage programs.**

“People say that marriage is 50/50, but I say it takes 100/100 from both people to make it work. Participating in the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program [PREP] made our relationship stronger, and we are now more understanding of each other.”

Charles Thomas  
Knapsack Program Participant



## The Bottom Line

Action starts with information. So far, the organizations receiving ACF grants for public awareness and community resource projects have provided a wealth of information to the public on healthy marriages, which likely will spur much action. For example:

- Nearly 500 people attended marriage mentor training in South Carolina presented by Heritage Community Services.
- More than 100 people attended the “Building and Strengthening Healthy Marriages” conference cosponsored by Heritage Community Services to kick-off their mentoring program.
- 900 people applying for marriage licenses in Johnson County, Indiana, received information from the Marriage Investors program.
- More than 200 hits per month were logged on the Marriage Investors’ website.
- Nearly 1,000 families have received home visits and educational materials from the Knapsack Project in Louisiana.

The examples below highlight three of the most successful public awareness and community resource programs that were made possible in part through ACF grants.

## *Ideas in Action*

### **Heritage Community Services**

In South Carolina, Heritage Community Services has held community forums and conferences to recruit mentor couples, share information, and educate the public about ways to build healthy marriages. In addition, representatives from Heritage Community Services have networked with churches and other organizations to train mentor couples on how to work with couples. Through their work with local schools, representatives from Heritage Community Services also have talked with teens about the benefits of and preparations for marriage.

### **Marriage Investors—United Way of Johnson County**

In Indiana, the Marriage Investors program maintains a Family Resource Center stocked with books, quizzes, workbooks, videos, and other materials and self-guided tools for couples and individuals searching for information on how to build a healthy marriage. Marriage Investors also has a website and distributes a quarterly newsletter with information on project activities, community events, and additional community providers. To spread the word about the resource center, Marriage Investors reaches out to couples applying for marriage licenses. The program also distributes brochures and fliers through several channels—by sending them home with children attending Head Start at local United Way agencies and distributing them at local fast food restaurants and in low-income housing communities.

### **Healthy Marriage Knapsack Project**

In Louisiana, organizers of the Knapsack Project have developed a cadre of resources that Child Protection caseworkers can select from and place into knapsacks tailored to the circumstances of individual families. These resources include videos, brochures, and self-guided materials, all of which can be used to facilitate family discussions. Although knapsacks are tailored to individual families, special materials have been developed for teens, African-American families, married couples, unmarried families, and cohabitating families.



## GROWING NEW LEADERS

### *Once Upon A Time...*

**A** therapist started seeing an increasing number of cases where it was evident that the client and his or her spouse both needed to improve their conflict management skills if their marriage was to survive special circumstances, such as the adoption of a child or the birth of a child with special needs. However, the therapist had never worked in these areas.

*To ensure that her clients were receiving the best possible service, the therapist needed to learn more about working with couples who have unique needs.*

Counselors, social workers, and other social service providers tasked with teaching people to build healthy marriages must adapt to the special needs of a diverse client base. This helps ensure that individuals and couples receive the most appropriate services for their circumstances and learn to apply the lessons, skills, and techniques learned from the services in the correct manner.

“This class and the work we do could not have been done without Federal funding. The class takes the family therapy model and integrates it into social work.”

Mary McGrath  
Former Student/Participant in the  
Syracuse University Program



## The Bottom Line

Social workers, therapists, and researchers need new tools and training to prescribe the most appropriate approaches to building a healthy marriage regardless of their clients' challenges or needs. ACF grants for these types of programs help to develop the tools and training. For example, the Syracuse program already has:

- Led to the creation of new assessment tools to help workers better understand each family's situation and map appropriate solutions.
- Trained more than 25 professionals.
- Led to the development of a training curriculum that can be replicated at other educational institutions.

However, the training that students receive in a traditional social work program may not include practical marriage and family therapy techniques. At the same time, individuals training to become marriage counselors or therapists may not be taught in the most culturally competent ways to address the needs of low-income populations or families in challenging circumstances.

Thus, ACF provides grants to programs that will help **grow a new crop of leaders** that have the right combination of theoretical and real world skills and knowledge to meet every client's needs. In particular, ACF has funded a program that emphasizes training in groups, which facilitates learning and develops leadership.

## *Ideas in Action*

In New York, Syracuse University is implementing the "Promoting Child Welfare: Training Professionals to Support Healthy Marriages, Relationships, and Families" project. This curriculum and training offer opportunities for students and professionals to enhance their ability to facilitate and conduct client-appropriate activities that strengthen marriages. The program was developed and is taught by an interdisciplinary staff who ensure that students learn to view marriage and relationships in a culturally appropriate way.

A critical part of this project is to integrate Social Work, Marriage and Family Therapy, and Child and Family Studies into Children Services. In this program, marriage and family therapists learn to identify community resources and how to make better connections between families and resource providers. At the same time, social workers learn intense therapy skills that focus on building healthy relationships. Everyone in the program receives lessons about policy and research. The students also learn concrete skills to ground their theoretical work.



## A FEW LESSONS ALONG THE WAY

Since distributing the initial grants under the Healthy Marriage Initiative, ACF has learned numerous lessons based on the hard work of the grant recipients, who used many different approaches for delivering healthy marriage services to a variety of families, couples, and individuals. These lessons are critical for organizers of future programs as they embark on new endeavors to promote healthy marriages.

### **Recruiting participants can be challenging, but the challenges can be overcome.**

- Many successful programs recruit participants by reaching out to people already involved in other programs, such as Head Start, or accessing other services, such as job centers.
- Every program should distribute information about their services using multiple approaches, such as face-to-face encounters, flyers, community events, newspaper advertisements, and word of mouth. Neighborhood settings, such as barber shops or recreation centers, are good locations for posting materials.
- Past participants represent an important resource for recruiting new participants, and their testimonials help build credibility.

“Effective programs share several common features, including this one: They send a clear message that a healthy marriage makes a big difference to both parents and children.”

Dr. Wade Horn  
Assistant Secretary of the  
Administration for Children and  
Families

### **Mentor couples are a valuable asset.**

- Numerous successful programs include services where mentor couples work with participants who value hearing from other married couples who have overcome their own challenges and conflicts.
- Mentor couples should serve as real-life role models for how a marriage can work.

### **Creative approaches are necessary to ensure client participation and program completion.**

- Parents and other people are more likely to participate in a program if child care or transportation services are offered. Classes also should be offered at a variety of times, locations, and settings to accommodate busy lifestyles.
- Modest incentives, such as door prizes and gift certificates, encourage participants' ongoing attendance.
- Some programs should use males as instructors and in other roles to increase male participation.

### **Small group settings work well for participants.**

- Participants should be allowed to interact with other individuals and couples with similar characteristics and challenges.
- Rather than trying to serve multiple types of groups at once, it is more successful to serve participants in groups based on their characteristics (i.e., married couples, dating couples, singles).
- Alternate methods for engaging individuals or couples. Although most participants prefer group settings, explore different group situations, such as home visits, overnight retreats, or specialized workshops.

### **Healthy marriage education programs can be helpful in unintended ways.**

- Client participation can help uncover other issues such as domestic violence, mental health challenges, or substance abuse.
- Programs should encourage the development of communication and conflict resolution skills, which can help foster improved family relationship situations.

### **Unwed parents desire more information about healthy marriages.**

- Unmarried parents want to learn more about commitment and the institution of marriage, in addition to knowing how to develop the skills to form a healthy marriage.
- Most unmarried parents want to get married and to know how to go about being married.

### **Work with what you have.**

- Fancy facilities or new staff are not necessary to conduct a good marriage strengthening initiative. Existing staff can be trained to offer effective services.
- A lot of money and resources are not needed. Many low-cost or no-cost approaches and assistance are available to help build new marriage strengthening services.



## ACF: PRODUCING HEALTHIER MARRIAGES AND HAPPIER ENDINGS

### *A Proactive Approach*

**T**raditionally, the government has almost exclusively focused on helping families pick up the pieces after they break down. An ounce of prevention goes a long way, however, and the government is now taking a more proactive approach by providing services that support families by making them stronger before they break down. The agency at the forefront of this new approach is the Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

“To the extent to which we are successful in promoting healthy marriages, we will be successful in preventing many of the social ills that impede the healthy development of children, families, and indeed, nations.”

Dr. Wade Horn  
Assistant Secretary of the  
Administration for Children and  
Families

## **The Healthy Marriage Initiative Is:**

- Focused on increasing the percentage of children raised by married parents and free of domestic violence.
- Focused on increasing the percentage of couples who are in a healthy marriage.
- Focused on increasing awareness about the value of a healthy marriage.
- Focused on equipping couples, youth, and young adults with skills to choose, form, and sustain a healthy marriage.
- Focused on supporting and encouraging research on healthy marriages and marriage education.

## **The Healthy Marriage Initiative Is Not:**

- About forcing anyone to get or stay married.
- About trapping anyone in an abusive relationship.
- About running a federal dating service.
- About reducing or diminishing in any way the important work of single parents.
- About withdrawing support for single-parent families or their children.

Operating within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ACF oversees 65 different social programs, including child welfare, child support enforcement, and anti-poverty initiatives, and welfare programs. Many of these programs were created or expanded to help solve the problems created by the break up of families and marriages. However, ACF is now launching new programs, such as the Healthy Marriage Initiative, to turn this tide and help couples form and sustain healthy marriages and families and begin preventing problems before they start.

## *Using What We Have*

When the Healthy Marriage Initiative was launched, ACF did not need to invent a new service delivery system to get marriage education services to families. It already was connected to families through its existing programs. And through these existing programs, ACF provided more than 100 grants, totaling more than \$25 million, through five of its key program offices, connecting directly with state and community service providers that serve families. Because the service providers were familiar with local issues and needs, they were able to develop customized programs that met the needs of families in their communities.

## *Just Getting Started*

Providing grants through existing networks is only one part of ACF's strategy. In addition, ACF has been involved in conducting research on healthy marriage services, providing technical assistance, developing and disseminating information, and working internally to find appropriate ways to include healthy marriage services in other federally supported programs. Currently, ACF is developing programs that focus on African-American and Hispanic communities.

ACF has come a long way in a short time in helping to provide services that produce healthier families and happier endings, but a long journey is ahead. We can't say, "The End" yet. ACF is just getting started.

## *For Additional Information*

The projects highlighted in this publication represent just a few of the ACF-funded projects and activities from the following ACF program offices: The Administration for Native Americans; the Children's Bureau; the Office of Child Support Enforcement; the Office of Community Services; and the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

We invite you to contact our grantees directly to learn more about their exciting efforts.

### **Healthy Marriage Initiative Grantees**

#### **Bethany Christian Services of Georgia**

Tracy Hall  
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thall@bethany.org  
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#### **Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma-Ada, Oklahoma**

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#### **Family Connections-Alabama Children's Trust Fund**

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#### **Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Nampa Healthy Marriage Project**

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#### **Jewish Family and Community Services**

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#### **Louisiana Healthy Marriage Knapsack Project**

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Kalford@syr.edu  
www.thrivingcouplesthinkingkids.syr.edu

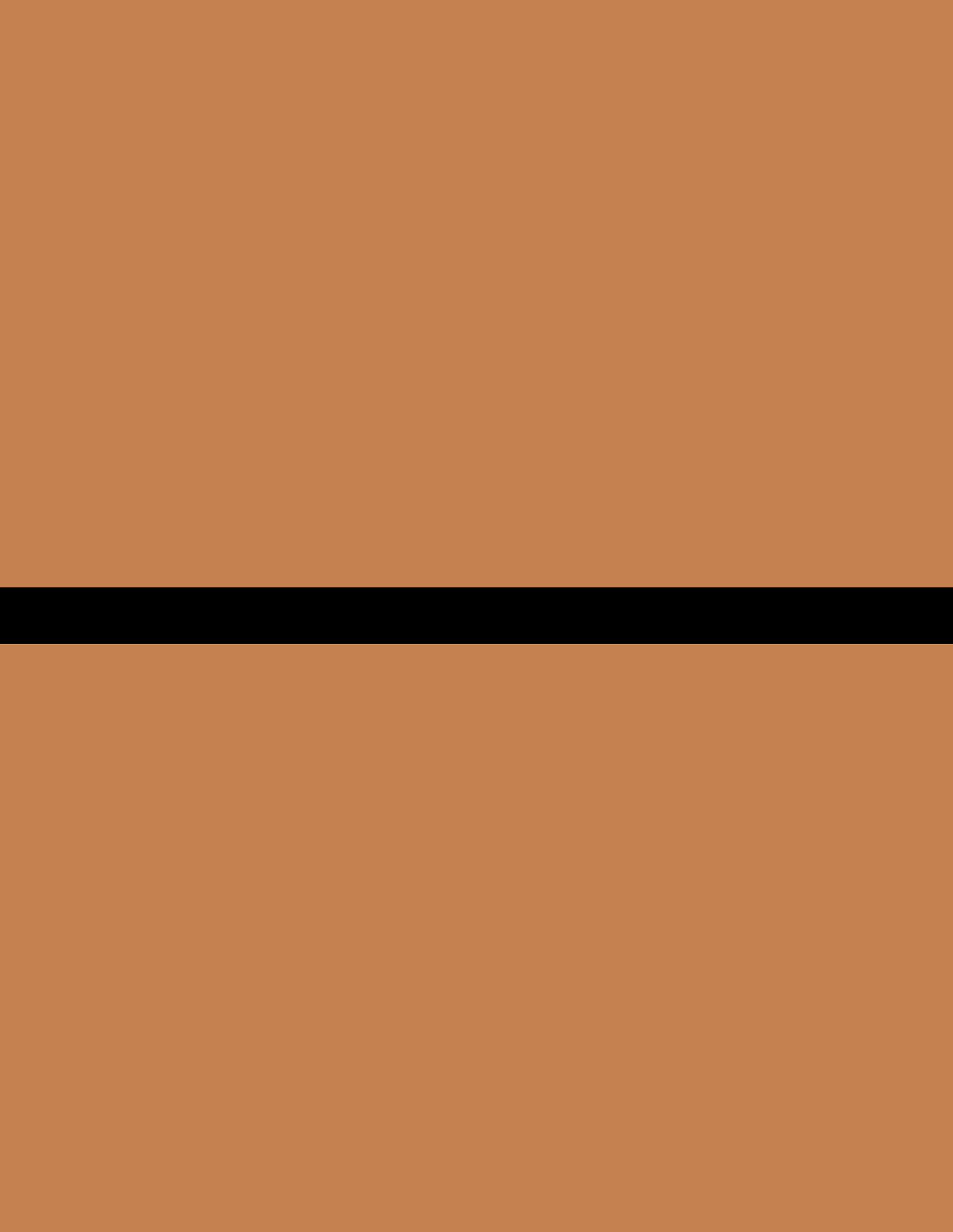
### **Administration for Children and Families Healthy Marriage Initiative Links**

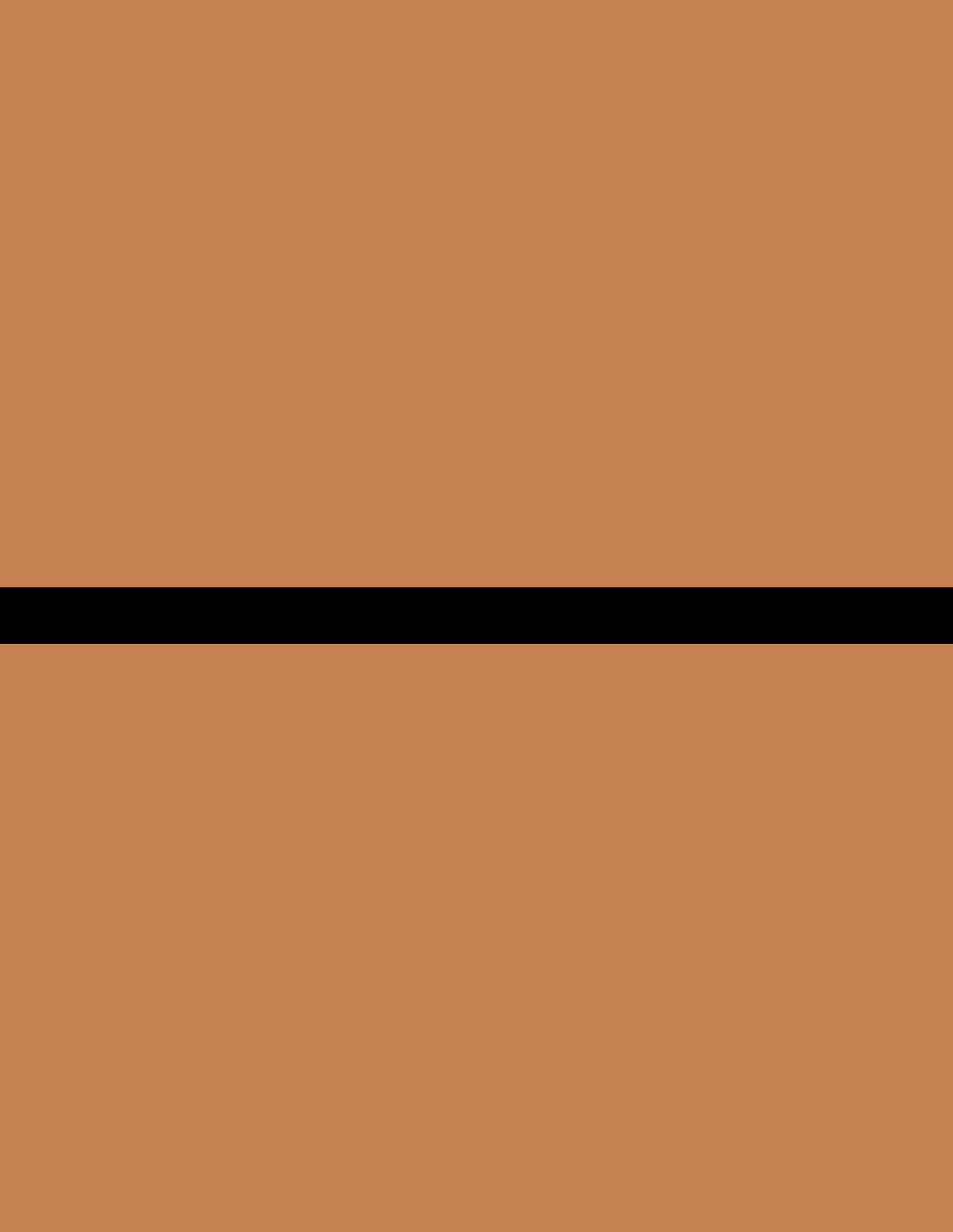
**National Healthy Marriage Resource Center**  
www.healthymarriageinfo.org

**Healthy Marriage Initiative**  
www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage

**African American Healthy Marriage Initiative**  
www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/aa\_hmi/AAHMI.html

**Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative**  
www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/about/hispanic\_hm\_initiative.html







Department of Health and Human Services

Administration for Children and Families

Office of Family Assistance

370 L'Enfant Promenade

Washington, DC 20447

[www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage)