



Emerging Findings from the Office of Family Assistance
Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Grant Programs:

A Review of Select Grantee Profiles and Promising Results



The Active Relationships Center

Community Healthy Marriage Grantee (multiple activities)

Hispanic Active Relationships Project

Organization Description

The Active Relationships Center (ARC) based in Dallas, Texas, has been a training and information resource on healthy marriage since 1999. ARC's founder, Kelly Simpson, dates the organization's initiation into "healthy marriage" programming to 1997 when she attended the first annual Smart Marriages Conference. Ms. Simpson, who has a Master's Degree in Psychology and is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, launched ARC's first curricula in 2003 through pilots with the U.S. Army and faith-based organizations, and wrote its first healthy marriage grant in 2004. Since that time, ARC has been noted for excellence in the healthy marriage field and its curricula are included for use by the Army Strong Bonds program.

Program Description

- The Hispanic Active Relationships Project (HARP) of Cameron County, Texas serves over 1,000 Hispanic families per year. Services are available in both English and Spanish.
- Project services began with a multi-media public awareness campaign on the value of marriage and marriage education, followed by ongoing marriage education and relationship skills seminars that serve married couples, engaged or dating (pre-marital) couples, unmarried individuals, and youth.
- HARP services also include peer mentoring for couples and weekend retreats.

Outcomes

Results of pre- and post-seminar assessments indicate widespread improvements in both communication and money management skills. Communication classes have resulted in the largest positive changes overall, including a:

- 12 percent increase in marital satisfaction
- 12 percent increase in assessed communication skills
- 19 percent decrease in relationship aggression

Success Stories

Emily and Jorge

Jorge saw the HARP billboard as he was driving home one day. Since his relationship was about to end, the billboard caught his attention. He wrote down HARP's number and once he was home he told his wife about the billboard and that he wanted to call to get information. His wife, Emily, had given up on the relationship and was convinced that their marital problems did not have a solution. After Jorge called and received the workshop information he convinced Emily to at least go and try it out. He asked her to give their relationship one last chance before signing their divorce papers.

Emily was very angry, resentful, full of mixed emotions, and did not want to get her hopes up too high. Both Emily and Jorge ended up staying for the whole 12-hour class. They are still together and are determined to make their marriage work. Thanks to the HARP workshops, they learned that it is okay to forgive each other and they discovered great tools to communicate better and resolve their issues. Emily and Jorge, standing in front of class with tears in their eyes, spoke about how their lives and relationship had changed for good and how they will be forever thankful to HARP for having such a huge impact on their lives.

Rosemary and Rafael

Rosemary and Rafael only started attending the HARP class because Rafael's mother had asked them to. They had been co-habiting for two years and were the parents of a two-year-old boy. They admitted after the workshop that they had not intended to stay for the whole class, but ended up listening attentively and participating in every exercise. Rosemary and Rafael knew they were not a perfect couple and admitted they had major communication issues in their relationship. After the workshop, participants were offered a "Together-in-Texas" certificate that allowed them to receive a discount on a marriage license. Rafael surprised everyone, including Rosemary, by asking for one and explaining that he had learned the importance of marriage and the commitment that comes with it. He expressed his desire to get married for the good of their relationship and their son. Rosemary was very excited as she had been dreaming about getting married.

Rafael's decision not only affected Rosemary; it also motivated the rest of the participants to invest more time in their marriages and to value the gift of marriage. The next month they both attended a money management workshop and announced that they had made wedding plans and were saving money for a small reception.

For more information about the Hispanic Active Relationships Project visit <http://www.activerelationships.com>



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