

Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Low-Income, Hispanic Couples in Stepfamilies
Funding Opportunity: Head Start Healthy Marriage Initiative (HHS-2007-ACF-OHS-YD-0040)

ABSTRACT

The proposed project will teach healthy marriage skills to low-income, Hispanic couples in stepfamilies. As the target population includes immigrant families, this project proposes to serve some of the neediest and most underserved couples in the country. Marriage education classes will be offered by three Head Start/Early Head Start agencies (at six different sites) in various counties throughout Central and Southern Utah. The Head Start agencies have established connections with and are already serving the targeted population. In light of the rates of divorce, cohabitation, and out-of-wedlock births, the rationale for this project is that stepfamilies are becoming an increasingly common family formation in the United States. There are, however, few educational programs that help couples prepare for remarriage and/or enhance their relationships in the context of stepfamily-living. There are even fewer programs, if any, that provide these services for low-income, Hispanic couples in stepfamilies.

This project will utilize the *Smart Steps* curriculum, a 12-hour research-based program. Adults, children, and adolescents (up to age 17) meet separately for the first hour-and-a-half of each class and then combine for the last half-hour for family-strengthening activities. The curriculum focuses on commitment, communication, (step) parenting, managing of family budgets, conflict management, and other elements to enhance family stabilization. The classes will be offered in Spanish. The English version of *Smart Steps* will be available to sites with English-speaking-Hispanic and non-Hispanic families, which will serve as a comparison group. Booster sessions and newsletters will reinforce the skills learned. By addressing the barriers that have historically hindered these couples from participating in marriage education, this project provides low-income, Hispanic couples in stepfamilies with unique opportunities to learn healthy marriage skills. The project will also include a longitudinal study of participant outcomes and a formative evaluation of effective strategies to reach and teach these fragile families.