

ABSTRACT

Award number: Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grant 90FE0129/01

Priority Area #8 – Healthy Marriage Grants to Implement Any Allowable Activity

The proposed project targets **allowable activities** Four and Five by teaching healthy marriage skills to ethnically diverse, low-income couples in stepfamilies. Educational classes will be offered at ten sites in partnership with seven family service organizations in northern Utah. These organizations have established family programs and connections with the targeted population. 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 ethnically diverse, low-income couples in stepfamilies.

This project will utilize the *Smart Steps* curriculum a 12-hour, research-based program for adults and children in stepfamilies. Adults and children meet separately for the first hour-and-a-half of each module and then combine for the last half-hour for family-strengthening activities. The curriculum focuses on relationship building, conflict management, commitment, and other essential relationship skills. The Spanish version of *Smart Steps* will be available to sites with predominantly Hispanic populations. Booster sessions and newsletters will **reinforce** the skills learned in the classes.

By addressing the barriers that have historically hindered these couples from participating in marriage education, this project provides low-income couples in stepfamilies with unique opportunities to learn healthy marriage skills. The project will also include a longitudinal study of participants and a formative evaluation of effective strategies to reach and teach these couples.