

USU Awarded Two \$5 Million Grants for Fatherhood and Relationship Education

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Utah State University was recently awarded two \$5 million grants from the U.S Department of Health and Human Services Office of Family Assistance. Both grants will be distributed over a five-year period and will fund fatherhood and relationship education programs.

Brian Higginbotham, Utah State University Extension associate vice president and professor in the Human Development and Family Studies Department in the College of Education and Human Services, will direct the projects.

“USU has a long history of extending research-based information to the citizens of Utah as part of our Healthy Relationships Utah initiative,” Higginbotham said. “These grants will allow us to expand on our previous efforts and partnerships to help adults in need of relationship education.”

The first grant will provide education for incarcerated fathers, also known as justice-involved fathers, a population that has been growing substantially in Utah. According to estimates from the U.S. Department of Justice, while the national average prison population has fallen by 1.2%, incarceration in Utah has increased by 4.3% in recent years.

“As a result, many children in Utah are at an increased risk for having an incarcerated father, which is also partially due to Utah having the second-highest fertility rate in the

nation,” Higginbotham said. “This puts them at a greater risk for compromised development outcomes.”

“InsideOut Dad,” a research-based curriculum, will be offered to justice-involved fathers looking to connect with their children. Participants will receive 24 hours of instruction in promoting and sustaining healthy relationships, responsible fatherhood and economic stability.

The second grant is focused on promoting relationship skills in stepfamily households. Following divorce, cohabitation or remarriage is quite common. However, there are gaps in services for those in stepfamily relationships.

To help close these gaps, the curriculum “Smart Steps,” will be offered to adults in stepfamilies. Participants will receive 12 hours of instruction in healthy marriage, relationship and parenting skills.

To address COVID-19 concerns and to reach individuals across the state, participants will have the option of participating in both courses either in person or virtually.

Additional information about Extension’s relationship education programs is available at HealthyRelationshipsUtah.org. The site includes information on a variety of grant-funded classes available to singles, couples, parents and stepfamilies.

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