

African American Healthy Marriage Initiative Newsletter

Administration for Children and Families
Office of Regional Operations
May 2007, Issue 2

Celebrating Black Marriages



We still honor our vow to...

**Love one another.
Comfort each other.
Keep each other, in sickness and
in health.
Forsake all others.
Keep only one another, as long
as we both shall live.**

On Sunday March 25, 2007, at least fifty cities across the United States celebrated Black Marriage DAY (BMD). Communities recognized the importance of marriage to the African American family and community in countless ways: launching a Hall of Fame to honor those married for more than forty years, requesting judges declare a moratorium on divorce the week prior, or encouraging couples to take a marriage education class.

Black Marriage Day was founded by Nisa Islam Muhammad on March 23, 2003. Its mission is "to honor, in perpetuity, those couples who have led by example, holding together for decades, those marriages whose enduring bonds now inspire us. We seek to recognize the joy and the pain that sometime accompanies the hard work it takes to stay together" (<http://www.blackmarriageday.com>). The event is now celebrated annually on the fourth Sunday of March.

This issue of the AAHMI newsletter highlights Black Marriage Day as well as Regional Events in March. Please send any questions or comments to Emily Hull, Healthy Marriage Specialist and Newsletter Editor, at Emily.hull@acf.hhs.gov.

The Healthy Marriage Initiative

is for couples who choose marriage for themselves to develop skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage. It is a strategy for achieving child well-being, recognizing that children do best when raised by both parents in a committed, healthy marriage.

ACF Navigation Key

1. Visit the AAHMI Website at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/aa_hmi/AAHMI.html
2. Visit the Healthy Marriage Initiative website at www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage
3. Visit the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center www.healthymarriageinfo.org

AAHMI Research Proceedings

<http://ssw.unc.edu/jif/>

SAVE THE DATE
AAHMI
Research Conference
June 19-21, 2007
UNC, North Carolina
To register, go to
<http://www.aahmi.org/app/nc/info.asp>

Community Corner: Ways to Celebrate Marriage

- 1) Encourage local television and radio stations, movie theaters or drama companies to celebrate Black Marriage Day with appropriate programs, films or productions.
- 2) Organize a Marriage Film Festival at your own community organization.
- 3) Ask employers to hold marriage seminars or brown bag lunches.
- 4) Organize a fundraiser—dance, walkathon, race, bake sale—to purchase marriage education books and tapes and donate them to the public or congregation library.
- 5) Organize a "Husband/Wife or Marriage of the Year" essay contest.
- 6) Send a marriage-strengthening book or give a gift certificate for a class to newlyweds, new parents, or anyone whose marriage could use a boost.
- 6) Create a "Ten Most Affordable (or best, or most romantic, or most creative) Marriage Dates" list/contest for your community. Get these to the media—radio, TV, newspapers, community newsletters.

Courtesy of http://www.blackmarriageday.com/wst_page7.html





MEDIA PULSE: GRANTEES

Region 2: Celebrating Real Family Life, a 2006 CCF Targeted Capacity Building grantee, is very creative. Not only does it facilitate “10 Great Dates for Black Couples,” but it takes classes to a one-act play called *Love Psalm*, which features a slave couple set in Alabama in the 1800s. To learn more about Celebrating Real Family Life, visit their web site at www.crf.org. Click on “CRFL in the News” to read articles about these events.

Region 7: The following article highlights a St. Louis SIP grantee from the Office of Child Support Enforcement. This grantee also partners with a Healthy Marriage Demonstration grant in the Office of Family Assistance.

http://tricityjournalstoday.com/articles/2007/03/28/life_and_style/sj2m20070327

In NYC at the Apollo Theater, Region 2 distributed information about ACF, the AAHMI and the HMI.



One of ACF's Own in a Black Marriage Day Hall of Fame

Left: Leon McCowan, the Regional Administrator for Region 6 at the Administration for Children and Families, smiles with his wife, Curtistene. They were honored on Black Marriage Day in the following excerpt from Desoto News.

At the AAHMI Research Conference in June 2007, McCowan will be a panelist at a workshop entitled, “My Kids and My Wife Have Been My Life”: A Qualitative Study of Married African American Fathers.

McCowan’s union seen as exemplary
By DAPHNE BROWN
Thursday, April 5, 2007 9:40 AM CDT

Leon and Curtisene McCowan are pillars.

They have been recognized for their decades of work with concerned DeSoto Citizens and the DeSoto School System; the latest acknowledgement, however, was most unexpected.

The couple, married 40 years, were among 15 Dallas area husbands and wives recognized by the Alliance for North Texas Healthy and Effective Marriages (ANTHEM) and inducted into the Dallas Black Marriage Hall of Fame.

“I was shocked,” Curtisene said. “I had no idea.”

Elma Goodwin nominated the couple, who have lived in DeSoto for more than 20 years, for the honor.

“From what I have observed, the McCowans are a wonderful model for a wholesome, loving marriage,” Goodwin said. “They appear to love each other unconditionally. They have raised two children who are well-adjusted and successful, and they are very, very involved with their three grandchildren.

Goodwin continues, “They adopt the village where they not only support the cause, but the model of their lives can shine through,” Goodwin said. “They are the best examples of ‘paying it forward.’ . . . They are an hall-of-fame couple.”

Communities Growing Together in Marriage

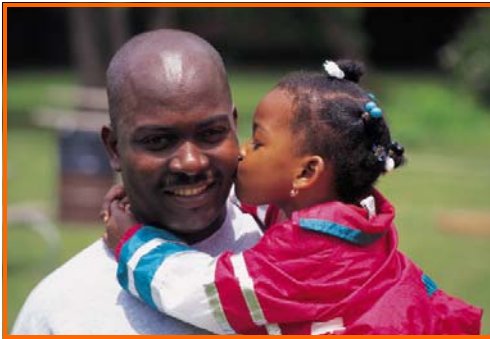
By Janice King-Dunbar

The Communities of Western Washington African American Healthy Marriage Initiative (CWW-AAHMI) 2007 Black Marriage Day Celebration was held on Saturday, March 24, at the Vietnamese Church in South Seattle. ACF had a resource table available with reference material on the Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI) as well as specific material on the AAHMI.

The celebration was well attended, with an estimated 30 to 40 attendees. The theme was “Communities Growing Together” with an emphasis on honoring couples with long-standing marriages. There were six couple honorees with marriages that ranged from 60 to 29 years of marriage. The keynote speaker was Dr. Clarence Shuler of Building Lasting Relationships, Inc. Dr. Shuler spoke about communication in marriages and was well received. In addition, there were musical selections by a local couple (Phil and Felecia Curry). The partners of CWW-AAHMI showed their appreciation to ACF Region 10 staff by presenting them with a recognition declaration of Black Marriage Day by King County Executive Ron Sims.

Attendees were very excited to hear about the forth coming AAHMI Research Conference in June. It was a wonderful celebration and beginning for the CWW-AAHMI. They are excited about planning future events in support of the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative.





Annual New England Fathering Conference

By Josephine Hauer & Marilyn Lasky
ACF Region 1

What do dads want and need? Over four hundred gathered for a two-day exploration of how best to support fathers and their children at the 8th annual New England Fathering Conference in Wakefield, MA on March 21-22nd. Strategies for supporting dads' "wants and needs" were addressed holistically focusing on three topical areas: 1) Dads in the Family and Community; 2) Dads, Parenting Skills, Personal Health & Wellness; and, 3) Dads, Courts, Criminal Justice and Child Support.

Hugh Galligan, ACF Regional Administrator, offered welcoming remarks noting the history of the fatherhood movement in New England. "From a relatively small gathering of mostly Head Start folks in Cambridge, our efforts to expand quality services to dads have taken root in state agencies, private organizations and federal programs. Your work over the past eight years has certainly helped Washington to think about the importance of these issues, resulting in recent legislation that provides 50 million dollars of funding for Fatherhood programs."

This year's conference organizers included representatives from a wide range of community organizations, state agencies and ACF Region 1. The committee made sure that key issues for dads were addressed in practical ways in over twenty-four workshops, keynote presentations and featured panels. Parenting, workforce development, mediation, dad's health, re-entry programs, healthy relationships and marriage, and teaching kids to read were just some of the two-hour workshop topics offered.

John Badalament, documentary filmmaker, writer, and educator, opened the conference with a keynote about modern fatherhood noting that the Industrial Revolution forced men's focus into the workplace away from the family farm or local community. "Today, we are at the beginning of 'the road home' where men are defining their role as nurturers, and not just providers." He recommends that virtues like compassion and empathy be reframed as qualities supporting masculine strength and integrity. Video clips from his upcoming documentary entitled, "Gender Traps: How marriage problems start in kindergarten" showed that traditional stereotypes of male and female roles and expectations are formed early in the lives of children. Badalament suggests that modern dads need to 1) create a personal legacy; 2) show up physically in the lives of children; 3) connect emotionally to family daily; and, 4) model healthy adult relationships.

The voices of "real dads" together with fatherhood pract-

itioners were heard in three Topic Area Panel discussions. Their stories helped to personalize the many challenges that men face as they seek to improve their parenting, develop new skills, or navigate the legal system. Jeff, a dad from Maine, spoke about his experiences in a Portland father's group: "What kept me coming back was that I felt useful - they gave me something to do right away - I started to help organize an outing for dads and their kids."

New England experts from two state agencies and two community-based organizations participated in an interactive dialogue facilitated by Mr. Galligan that examined why their organizations have made fatherhood front and center in their efforts to strengthen families. Whether their agency's mission involves child safety and well-being, family self-sufficiency, improved health outcomes, or helping to reduce poverty, the panel agreed that:

- Dads matter to their children whether they are living with them or not
- Dads benefit from the peer support and coaching of other dads
- Dads are more likely to pay child support consistently and be involved in the lives of their children when they are employed
- Dads do respond when agencies and programs become "father friendly"
- Dads can learn parenting and relationship skills
- Most dads want to *do what's right* if they can figure out *how*

1-Minute Research: Kids Need BOTH Parents

"If enough marriages had taken place to return the incidence of single parenting to 1970 levels, and the incomes of the men and women were combined, the poverty rate among children in 1998 would have fallen by a third."

Isabel V. Sawhill, "The Behavioral Aspects of Poverty,"
The Public Interest, Fall 2003.

Children in father-absent homes are five times more likely to be poor.

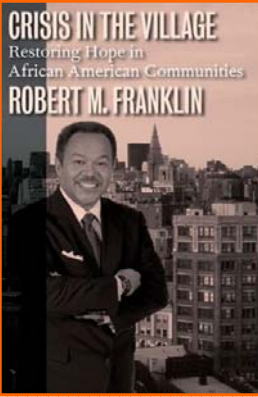
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Children's Living Arrangements and Characteristics: March 2002, P200-547, Table C8. Washington D.C.: GPO, 2003.



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Summer Reading



Dr. Robert M. Franklin's book, "Crisis in The Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities," cites ACF's Healthy Marriage Initiative. The following review is written by Pamela Marr.

Dr. Franklin will moderate a panel called "A Crisis in the Village: Fill the Prescription, Take the Medicine" at the AAHMI Research to Practice Conference, June 2007.

In this book Dr. Franklin expresses a desire to contribute to "what can and must be done to do a better job of 'people-making,' especially 'child-making,' acknowledging that this is a work that will require "the collective efforts, cooperation, and investment of the entire nation." He borrows his understanding of the "village" from the African proverb and focuses on three mediating or anchor institutions in the village: family, church and school.

The Administration for Children and Families Healthy Marriage Initiative is discussed in the chapter on "Families: Crisis of Commitment." In this chapter Dr. Franklin calls on the village to "stop business as usual and to begin a national conversation on the subject of healthy relationships." He defines healthy

relationships as "interpersonal bonds and interactions that are characterized by mutuality, trust, respect, nonviolence and sharing." Dr. Franklin provides a review of research findings on the benefits of healthy marriage and the research findings of Ron Mincy, Hillard Pouncy, Kathryn Edin, and W. Bradford Wilcox as related to the experiences of African American families and communities.

In discussing "The Impact of Public Policy on Black Families," Dr. Franklin also cites the federal government's efforts to make marriage education services available to low-income families. He provides an overview of the goals of the Healthy Marriage Initiative and the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative.

Marriage education has existed for many years in the United States; Dr. Franklin notes that only in recent years has it emerged in the African American community. Now that it has, it's become quite a phenomenon with many powerful leaders. Particularly, he cites Diann Dawson, Director of Regional Operations, as the senior African American administrative leader of federal efforts to support healthy marriage. To date, the federal AAHMI has hosted over 14 academies, conferences and forums to educate, facilitate and collaborate around healthy marriage in the African American community.

Sharpen Your Skills

The Soft-Start Up by John Gottman

When addressing a concern, begin gently. Your spouse won't go on the defensive and you'll create a positive climate for discussion.

— ACF's *Building Strong Families*, LCLC



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