

THE CLFC FAMILY REUNION NEWS

THE *CREATING LASTING FAMILY CONNECTIONS* ®
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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We hope you enjoy this special editorial edition of our CLFC Family Reunion Newsletter. We are very interested in receiving your input on our response to a recent article in the Los Angeles Times. Please respond with your comments to tstrader@sprynet.com. We hope to share some of the top comments in a future newsletter!

**A Marriage Professional Responds
By Ted N. Strader**

I am writing an open response to the Los Angeles Times article, “*Federal funds to foster healthy marriage have little effect, study finds*”, by Emily Alpert Reyes, published on February 9, 2014. In this article, it appears that Ms. Reyes is trying to assess a large number of different healthy marriage demonstration projects with an only tangential and over-reaching global research measure. Readers beware; the Los Angeles Times is clearly not a peer-reviewed research journal that holds to higher scientific standards in reaching what appears to be a political conclusion. As a published author in the research arena, an OFA Marriage program provider and as a concerned citizen, I invite the reader to take a closer look.

In the spirit of full disclosure, I served as a project director for one Healthy Marriage program involved in the study described in the LA Times. Yes, while each and every project targeted outcomes related to marriage, each project targeted a unique aspect of personal, family, or child related outcomes. Importantly, not each project targeted the national marriage rate. As an involved party, I see the LA Times article as a narrow, unscientific and less than insightful review of the benefits these projects may have provided.

The marriage project we conducted was able to demonstrate significant and substantial improvement in nine relationship skills for couples previously challenged by substance abuse and/or incarceration. Program participating couples demonstrated meaningful increases in the skill areas of communication, conflict resolution, emotional awareness, emotional expression, inter-personal interaction, intra-personal awareness, relationship management, relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment. These kinds of results are known to improve the quality of life in families and to also carry over into other areas of life as well. These results are published in the following peer-reviewed scientific journal: (Shamblen, S. R., Arnold, B. B.,

McKiernan, P., Collins, D. A., & Strader, T. N. (2013). Applying the Creating Lasting Family Connections Marriage Enhancement Program to marriages affected by prison reentry. *Family Process*, 52(3). 477-498.)

To illustrate the point about how these kinds of results have an even broader impact in our society, I'd like to describe a second project. In a related Fatherhood Program, also funded by the Administration for Children and Families, we also targeted improvements in these same nine relationship skills with dads reentering their families and communities after extended periods of incarceration that included drug treatment programming during their prison stay. This project used the reentry participant's interest in being a better father and asked these men to review their personal history of criminal behavior, their own parent role models, their personal and family history with alcohol and drugs, and their deepest wishes for their own children. The project helped these men recognize that it's hard to be a good daddy locked up in prison or languishing in the streets suffering from addiction. The project worked with men in an intensive relationship skills building program, the Creating Lasting Family Connections® Fatherhood Program: Family Reintegration. In addition to targeting the relationship skills described earlier, this project also aimed to improve participant refusal skills, alcohol and drug treatment and recovery support, and intergenerational prevention skills. This project substantially increased the same nine relationship skills as the previous project: communication, conflict resolution, emotional awareness, emotional expression, inter-personal interaction, intra-personal awareness, relationship management, relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment. Further, the program demonstrated improvements in the participant's sense of spiritual connectedness, decreased their intentions to binge drink, persuaded 82% to voluntarily be tested for HIV (as a demonstration of family fidelity upon their return to their family), and most importantly and impressively, reduced prison recidivism by up to 60%. This result alone produces a savings of over \$22,000 per year per person for incarceration. Not to mention that it brings daddy home! These results too are published in the following peer-reviewed scientific journal: (McKiernan, P., Shamblen, S. R., Collins, D. A., Strader, T. N., & Kokoski, C. (2013). Creating lasting family connections: Reducing recidivism with community-based family strengthening model. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 24(1), 94-122.)

These kinds of scientifically publishable results help move the national interest of public health and family wellbeing forward. The program experiences I briefly described here include just two of the hundreds of successful projects funded by ACF with marriage and relationships funding. Several other projects gained similar and meaningful outcomes. These types of projects help move our nation toward a deeper understanding of how to improve the lives of children growing up in American families. The cost of continuing some of the downward trends in the quality of family life in America is costly. Unfortunately, facts like these from any of the ACF funded projects did not make it into the Los Angeles Times article.

For decades we have chronicled the erosion of "family" in American culture. The costs to our society are immense. Billions and billions of dollars are spent on the physical, mental and emotional carnage resulting from broken families. The results shared here from just two of the hundreds of projects funded by the Administration for Children and Families bring no small measure of hope and guidance for our nations families and communities. I think LA Times

readers, and the world at large, would be well served to understand that several of these marriage projects did demonstrate tremendous promise for ongoing investment in our most precious resource: the American family.

Your voice is important. We are very interested in receiving your comments about this article.

Please respond with your comments to tstrader@sprynet.com. We intend to share some of the top comments in a future newsletter! Also, please [sign up](#) to receive the CLFC Family Reunion Newsletter, or follow us on Social Media at the following sites:

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