

States Engaging Human Need with Community Partners: Virginia and Strengthening Families

Virginia Healthy Marriage Stable Families Initiative

Through the Healthy Marriage and Stable Families Initiative, the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) awards grants which provide community-based family preservation and supportive services designed to strengthen marriages and stabilize families. Grantees include public agencies, domestic violence prevention programs, faith-based organizations, and other non-profit or community-based groups.

This initiative is interested in innovative approaches to locally identified needs, and funded projects must demonstrate measurable positive changes in the lives of the participants and their families. Projects can include concrete activities such as classes, seminars, workshops, inventories, support groups, and preventive counseling designed for use before or after a marriage or at any stage in a marriage. Organizations are encouraged to develop creative plans to address local challenges but the grant announcement provides the following examples of potential activities:

- Developing an effective community network or marriage task force to promote better public understanding of what healthy relationships require and better public access to related resources
- Establishing training events, support groups, or activity nights to focus on promoting healthy marriages
- Conducting communication and problem solving skills workshops for single individuals that will help them form healthy relationships
- Developing (or enhancing) community-based parenting programs to incorporate a marriage component and topics such as communication, conflict resolution, and relationship-building skills
- Developing and implementing programs to assist fathers in establishing positive relationship with their children that contribute to the well being of the children and that promote their physical, emotional, intellectual and social development.
- Implement fatherhood programs for incarcerated fathers.
- Offering programs to ensure that local teenagers will be better prepared for healthy dating relationships and marriage
- Assisting single parents with forming constructive relationships that are conducive to building a healthy relationship for the child and the non-custodial parent
- Providing individuals who have experienced abuse, rape, or domestic violence with training for building healthy relationships and marriages
- Developing (or enhancing) community-based healthy relationship programs for ex-offenders and their families to incorporate a family stabilization and/or marriage component and topics such as communication, conflict resolution, and relationship-building skills.

For additional information, email community.connections@dss.virginia.gov or call (800) 777-8293.

Family Preservation Programs

For several years the Virginia General Assembly has earmarked TANF funds for specific family preservation programs. These programs are implemented through a cooperative agreement between the Virginia Department of Social Services and the Virginia Department of Health. Currently funded programs include:

- Partners in Prevention (PIP) – This program targets those between the ages of 18 and 29 and focuses on marriage before conception, male responsibility, abstinence plus contraception education, discouraging high risk sexual behavior, and stressing healthy relationships and healthy marriage as a positive message.

More information: <http://www.vahealth.org/pip/>

- Resource Mothers/Girls Empowered for Success (GEMS) – The GEMS Program combines mentoring, group activities and community service to promote positive life choices in the younger sisters of pregnant or parenting teens.

More information: <http://www.vahealth.org/wih/GEMS/>

- Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (TPPI): TPPI is a community-based program with the goal of helping to reduce the rate of teenage pregnancies in seven areas with high teen pregnancy rates: Alexandria, Norfolk, Richmond, Petersburg area, Eastern Shore, Roanoke, and Portsmouth. TPPI coalitions spearhead community efforts and collaborate with other local organizations and programs to provide a variety of school and community-based services.

More information: <http://www.vahealth.org/teenpregnancyprevention/>

- Domestic Awareness Campaign (Statutory Rape Awareness): This program is designed to reach state and local law enforcement officials, the education system, and relevant counseling services in order to provide education and training on the problem of statutory rape so that teenage pregnancy prevention programs may be expanded in scope to include men.

More information: <http://www.vahealth.org/civp/sexualviolence/varapelaws/>

- Comprehensive Health Investment Project (CHIP) – CHIP provides services to assist parents in acquiring parenting skills, learning about growth and development, promoting the health and well-being of their families, and increasing self-sufficiency.

More information: <http://www.chipofvirginia.org/>

Strengthening Families Resources

[Administration for Children & Families – Healthy Marriage Initiative](#)

[Virginia Governor Tim Kaine's Start Strong Initiative](#)

[First Lady Anne Holton's For Keeps Initiative](#)