In This Issue

Marriage is currently a topic of considerable discussion and debate in a wide range of circles: the general public, state and national policymakers, practitioners and academics, for example. It is also a topic that was raised a number of times at the 2003 Children's Summit hosted by University of Minnesota President Robert Bruiniks. This newsletter attempts to look at some of the issues related to marriage and families through a variety of lenses: research, practice and opinion. It is intended to stimulate thinking and discussion on this very important topic.

Creating A Culture That Supports Marriage

Madge Alberts, M.A., CYFC Program Coordinator and Certified Family Life Educator

Regardless of what one believes about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of putting marriage on the public agenda, there is little argument that existing and future marriages can benefit from a social culture that values and supports strong marriage relationships.

A "marriage culture," as some call it, would be a cross-cutting civic movement that recognizes the importance of the institution of marriage for couples who choose it, and has supports in place to strengthen those relationships.

Because of the intimate nature of marriage, communities and individuals have largely taken a "hands off" attitude in recent years. The result is that couples are left largely to their own devices to make sure their marriages succeed. Until recently there has been little formal preparation for marriage, so couples aren't always ready for the bumps in the road that naturally occur in ongoing relationships where people are with each other day in and day out, and couples often think they are the only ones experiencing problems. Bill Doherty, professor at the University of Minnesota and prominent author and speaker on marriage issues, has raised this issue by asking questions such as, "When you meet your friends and acquaintances, how often do you ask them, 'How is your relationship going? How's your marriage doing?' We ask how the kids are, how the family is, how work is going, etc? But we never ask about the couple relationship."

Doherty also points out, in his book "Take Back Your Marriage," that our consumer culture encourages people to get something new when the old doesn't meet their needs, and this attitude has had a profound effect on marriage. When the marriage ceases to meet individual needs, it's time to move on.

A marriage culture would encourage a better balance between individual rights and needs, and family responsibilities. It would encourage strong models for good marriage, both in individual families and in the variety of images that occur in society. It would recognize that marriage is not easy, and that couples need ongoing formal and informal support systems.

Is the current "healthy marriage movement" the answer to creating a culture that supports marriage? Some, including many highly respected scholars, believe it is, for a number of reasons: a vast majority of the population (the figure of 90% is often cited) desires to marry, and in fact does marry at least once; research clearly shows the negative economic and social-emotional consequences for children who grow up without the daily presence of a mother and father; marriage is a critical building block in strong and stable communities; childbearing and marriage need to be reconnected in the eyes of society.

Others, however, are concerned that the focus of the current marriage movement is too narrow and does not support the broad range of family forms that are present in our society.

Sociologist Stephanie Coontz believes a more effective way to support marriage is the creation of work-life policies that recognize the need for couples to spend time with their children and each other, that provide high quality child care, and that allow flexibility in work arrangements so couples can respond to the needs of their families.

Coontz and others say that any movement that sees marriage as the locus of child rearing, dependent care, emotional support and commitment, or reducing poverty doesn't understand how much society, family life, and marriage have changed over time.

Creating a culture that supports couples who choose to marry is an appropriate societal goal. But in doing so, it is important that the unique situations of low income families, families from different cultures and religious backgrounds, divorced families, single parent families, gay and lesbian families, as well as concerns

CONSORTIUM CONNECTIONS

The Children, Youth & Family Consortium was established in fall 1991 in an effort to bring together the varied competencies of the University of Minnesota and the vital resources of Minnesota's communities to enhance the ability of individuals and organizations to address critical health, education, and social policy concerns in ways that improve the well-being of Minnesota children, youth,

CYFC
BUILDING BRIDGES FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

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“In order to choose – and become – a good marriage partner, a child needs to see beyond shallow media images of fairy-tale weddings or casual sex.”

The Long View…

Marti Erickson, Ph.D., Senior Fellow, CYFC

Whatever you think about the role of government in promoting marriage, it’s hard to argue with the fact that a good marriage is still the dream of most Americans. For example, 80% of high school girls say they consider having a good marriage extremely important. And in a Roper poll a few years ago, 99% of respondents endorsed the importance of marital success.

So, as a developmental psychologist, I take the long view and ask what we could do to increase the odds that our children will develop the skills and attitudes to make their marriage dreams come true. Because seeds of a healthy marriage are planted at an early age, here are some things I’d bet on:

- A Strong Start

It is in first attachments with parents and other caregivers that a baby develops trust, empathy, and the ability to regulate emotions. With sensitive, responsive care, a child learns to be both the nurtured and the nurturer – roles carried forward into future relationships, including marriage. So we would do well to help parents garner the resources, support and knowledge they need to give their children a strong start. Given that most young children spend time in childcare, we also should pay attention to the quality of that care. Underpaid, undereducated staff, with understandably high turnover, results in less than adequate care for too many children today.

- Good Models

Children learn what they see. In order to choose – and become – a good marriage partner, a child needs to see beyond shallow media images of fairy-tale weddings or casual sex. At home and in the community a child needs to see realistic examples of committed couples sharing laughter and hugs, as well as working through the tough times that confront any marriage. To reinforce real-life models, parents would be wise to seek out children’s books, videos and films that feature strong marriages and families coping positively with challenges.

- Tools of the Trade

Many of the skills needed to build and maintain a strong marriage can be taught in childhood — positive communication, how to set and respect boundaries, peaceful conflict resolution, to name a few. (These same skills make for safe schools and a well-functioning workplace – life skills of great importance.) As children approach dating age, parents, youth workers, and religious leaders can coach them in how to apply these skills in romantic relationships. And by creating safe places where young people can gather to talk, play and engage in service, adults can help youth build a

CONSORTIUM CONNECTIONS

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Why Prepare for Marriage?

By David H. Olson, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus, Family Social Science, University of Minnesota
and President of Life Innovations

"Failing to prepare is like preparing to fail."

With the divorce rate remaining about 50%, marriage is one of the highest risk choices people voluntarily make. In spite of the risk, most people still want to get married. Marriage is challenging and even with those that stay married, one or both of the spouses are often unhappy with the marriage.

Premarital preparation for couples is much like the Head Start Program for children. It is designed to help the premarital couples get their marriage off to a good start. Studies have consistently shown that the problems couples have before marriage carry over into marriage and usually intensify, with new issues also emerging. So the better the couple is prepared for the challenges of marriage, the better their chance of having a successful marriage.

The goal of premarital programs is to give couples resources to better deal with the many challenges of marriage. Premarital preparation should give couples knowledge about marriage and their relationships, describe healthy and realistic attitudes about marriage and teach relationship skills, especially communication and conflict resolution.

A successful premarital program should include six components.

1. Couples should take some type of premarital inventory and receive feedback on the results. The three most validated and popular premarital inventories are PREPARE, FOCCUS and RELATE.
2. The couple should receive training on communication and conflict resolution skills.
3. The couple should participate in small group discussion with other couples.
4. The program should start a year before marriage. Programs offered 2-3 months before marriage have less impact on the couple.
5. Programs should contain about 4-6 sessions, preferably about 1-2 hours each in order to have maximum impact.
6. The program should encourage couples to continue ongoing marriage enrichment after marriage.

Premarital inventories can also help counselors identify and work with couples that may be at high risk for divorce. It has been found that if more intensive work is done with high risk couples, it can either help them to improve their relationship or to decide not to get married. In some cases, the best way to prevent divorce is to help high risk couples decide not to marry that person.

Research studies have demonstrated that premarital preparation programs are generally effective in the short run, but their impact drops off over time. In a recent review of premarital studies, Jason Carroll and William Doherty reviewed 13 studies and found that 12 of 13 showed improvement in interpersonal skills (communication and problem solving) compared to a control group. Seven studies doing follow-ups found a drop in the impact of the program after 6-12 months. A few studies have been done 3-5 years after the program and the impact is more questionable. It appears that couples probably need additional couple enrichment overtime to maintain a good marriage. (See related article on Strengthening Marriage Over the Lifespan).

A new study using the PREPARE Program (Knutson and Olson, 2003) demonstrated that four sessions with premarital couples had a significant impact on their relationship. The program involves giving the assessment and then providing feedback using six couple exercises that provide insights and relationship skills. Over half of the couples developed a significantly improved relationship. Most (83%) of the group with lowest couple satisfaction also significantly improved their relationship. In summary, the program improved the couples' chance of marital success.

While more family life educators and marital therapists are doing work with premarital couples, clergy (often with married couples serving as mentors) still do the majority of work with marriage preparation. There are a growing number of marriage mentors, who are typically older married couples trained to work with premarital couples. An unintended benefit of mentoring is that the relationship of both couples tends to improve.

References are included with the web-based version of this newsletter at www.cyfc.umn.edu/publications/connection

Strengthening Marriage Across The Lifespan

Pre-marriage education is effective in the short run, but the effect drops off over time, according to David Olson in the article on this page.

This finding suggests that a successful approach to strengthening marriage and families would include education and support over time. Since change is often stress producing, education at transition times that occur in almost all couple relationships may be one way of addressing this need.

Transition times in the family that may be opportunities for education include:

- A year after marriage
- Before and/or after the birth of the first child
- The first child starting school
- The first child becoming an adolescent
- A family member becoming disabled
- A major job change for one or both partners
- A significant loss in income
- Caregiving of older parents becomes necessary
- Children leave home or go to college
- One or both partners retire
- There is a death in the immediate family

Education can be offered by a variety of community agencies, schools, faith communities, or even the workplace. The format can be a formal learning environment, informal support groups, retreats, or other models, and can focus on individuals, couples or inter-generational groups.

Programs such as these can be an important part of developing a societal culture that supports marriage and families.

Does Marriage Matter for Kids?

By Mary Jo Czaplewski, PhD
Consultant and former Executive Director of the National Council on Family Relations

In the wake of current public discussion about marriage, politicians, scholars, and social service providers are focusing on the relationship of marriage to the health and well-being of children.

Though an impressive body of research over the past 20 years describes how changes in patterns of family structure affect children, much remains to be studied. On the whole, studies as well as observations by those who work with families concur that, on average, children do best when raised by their two married, biological parents who share a loving, low-conflict relationship.

Over the past 40 years, family living arrangements for children under age 18 have changed dramatically. According to the 1996 U.S. Census Bureau surveys of income and program participation, 71% of children under age 18 live in two-parent families (biological, adoptive, or step-parents), 25% in one parent families (single mother, single father, or one parent and a partner), and 4% lived with no-parents. Complicating a better understanding of how children fare in various situations is the fact that, over an 18-year period of time, a child's family structure may change several times due to death, divorce, remarriage, and other factors.

But in general, children who do not live with both biological parents, for whatever reason, are twice as likely to be poor, to have a birth outside of marriage, to exhibit behavioral and psychological problems, and to drop out of high school. They are also more likely to experience health problems from accidents, injuries, and poisonings.

Among the many questions still under study, and for which conclusive evidence has not been found, are such things as: Is it reduced income, or the changes in family structure that make a difference in child well-being? While studies show that children living with two co-habiting adults or in a step-family don't do as well as those living with their married biological parents, neither do children living with a single parent do as well, primarily due to reduced income. So is it the economic or structural factor that is to blame, or some combination of factors?

Another question: Is it the marriage itself or the distinctive characteristics of individuals who marry and stay married that produces positive outcomes for children? Studies confirm that certain benefits do accrue in marriage, such as access to health insurance, some tax advantages and increased resources. But those who marry may have attributes such as commitment, loyalty and a futures orientation that distinguishes them from their unmarried counterparts. Which is responsible for positive child outcomes?

That the quality of the relationships between parents does matter to children's well-being is well documented. Studies have shown that high marital discord takes its toll on children in terms of emotional well-being, stress and poor development of relationship skills. In such cases, children appear to do better when their parents divorce than if they stay married.

Studies confirm that children of single mothers are 5 times more likely to be poor than those in two-parent families. Children of single parents are also at greater risk for not completing school, becoming teen parents and being unemployed - all of which make it less likely they will eventually marry and stay married. It is uncertain whether poverty is the cause or the effect of single parenthood. But we do know that if two poor unmarried parents marry they are less likely to be poor. Cultural differences also come into play, in that in some cultures, marriage appears to be less of a protector against poverty.

Most would agree that a legal basis and public support of the institution of marriage helps to create the conditions in which children thrive the best. These include consistent, stable, loving attention from two parents, who are cooperative and share similar values, who have sufficient resources, and who receive support from extended family, friends and society. While marriage does not guarantee these conditions, and other family structures can also provide them, it appears that social networks, public policies, and continued study can strengthen marriages in the future, with the anticipated result of better outcomes for children.

(references are included with the web-based version of this newsletter at www.cyfc.umn.edu/publications/connection)

Same-Sex Relationships

Credible research on committed gay and lesbian relationships and families is just now beginning to emerge. Listed below are a few recent resources for consideration as we look at the issues related to same sex-marriage, domestic partnerships, civil unions, and parenting in gay and lesbian couples.

Oswald, Ramona Faith, Culton, Linda S.: Under the Rainbow: Rural Gay Life and Its Relevance for Family Providers. Journal of Family Relations : Vol. 52, No. 1, pp. 72–81. Focuses on a survey of 527 rural gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender individuals and inductively analyzes their responses to open-ended questions regarding the "best" and "worst" aspects of being GLBT in that area, and how to improve their lives as rural GLBT residents. Includes discussion on ways family professionals can develop commitment to GLBT families, enhance existing services, and advocate for political change.

Oswald, Ramona Faith.: Resilience Within the Family Networks of Lesbians and Gay Men: Intentionality and Redefinition. Journal of Marriage and Family : Vol. 64, No. 2, pp. 374–383. Reviews the literature on gay and lesbian family networks as a way to identify the resilience processes that enable members to create and strengthen their family networks.This review is a beginning effort to integrate current knowledge of sexual orientation and family strengths, and may be used to inform future research.

Is Marriage An Appropriate Public Policy Issue?

Mitchell B. Pearlstein, Ph.D., President, Center of the American Experiment

In considering whether "marriage is an appropriate public policy issue," one must also consider whether the following problems are appropriate public policy concerns.

Poverty, especially as it injures women and children. Is that a legitimate concern of government? What about poor educational performance by boys and girls? What about drug use and mental illness, again especially among young people? What about too-early sexual initiations and the teenage pregnancies that often result? What about all the cheated babies born of such fleeting unions? What about physical abuse inflicted on mothers and children? What about sexual abuse, particularly as inflicted on kids?

What about the immense human agony implicit in litanies like this – never mind the mountains of societal costs, of which money, including taxes, is just one? Might we agree that problems like these are legitimate subjects of governmental attention (which is not to say subject to adequate governmental solution)? But if we start from the demonstrable premise that every one of these problems – disasters, really – is made worse by children growing up in homes in which both of their parents do not live, how in the name of all that's rational and holy can we argue that public policy ought to be indifferent when it comes to marriage?

Time for all the caveats.

Insofar as marriage is a most intimate institution, any latitude granted to government to insinuate itself between husbands and wives ought to be near equatorial; i.e., just about zero. (Child protection is another matter.)

Insofar as marriage is a most intricate product of culture and faith, government ought to have no illusions about the capacity of policy tools as mundane as tax codes to sculpt or encourage it along. No hubris allowed.

And insofar as marriage is a most important institution (the most important institution when it comes to raising children), government's preeminent obligation in "treating" whatever might ail it must always be: First, do no harm, as unintended consequences can be rampant and poison.

It's also essential to add that nothing I say is meant to berate single moms, non-custodial dads, or anyone else. Likewise, I'm fully aware that millions of children growing up in single-parent homes are doing fine, and that millions of children growing up in two-parent homes are not. My focus, instead, is on what the breakdown of marriage – as manifested by both divorce and nonmarital births – sadly means on painful average for millions of children and the rest of our nation. And as I always try to point out in discussions like these, I'm in my second marriage myself.

But no matter how long a list of caveats and qualifications can be drawn, it will not be as potent as the first list above; the one outlining but a few of the ways in which the crumbling of marriage diminishes deeply. To propose marriage as a near-lone object of governmental aloofness neither computes nor ultimately helps. This is the case even though expectations ought to be modest when it comes, for example, to initiatives such as the Bush administration's interest in tying welfare reform to marriage education and promotion. It's a worthy plan, though I assume its main contribution will prove mostly symbolic; more of a nationwide signal that marriage deserves reverence rather than as a spur for welfare recipients to actually say "I do."

(references are included with the web-based version of this newsletter at www.cyfc.umn.edu/publications/connection)

Patterson, Charlotte J. 2000: Family Relationships of Lesbians and Gay Men. Journal of Marriage and Family : Vol. 62, No. 4, pp. 1052–1069. The family lives of lesbian and gay people have been a source of controversy during the past decade. Despite prejudice and discrimination, lesbians and gay men have often succeeded in creating and sustaining family relationships. Research on same-gender couple relationships, parent-child relationships, and other family relationships is reviewed here.

Gay and Lesbian Aging
http://ssw.che.umn.edu/faculty/jquam.htm
Dr. Jean Quam, professor and director of the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota, has focused considerable research and writing on aging in the GLBT population. Several of her publications are referenced on her faculty website.

Journal of GLBT Family Studies
This new peer-reviewed journal from Haworth Press is soliciting articles for its first volume scheduled for Spring 2005. Contents will focus on parent-child relationships, child development, sibling relationships family structure, intimate relationships, stepfamilies, alternative family structures and extended families in gay and lesbian couples. It will be edited by Dr. Jerry J. Bigner, Professor in Human Development and Family Studies at Colorado State University.

Consortium Calendar

Fall 2003 — Winter 2004

December 15
Arc Hennepin-Carver Workshops: A Parent's Journey. Shelly Christensen, coordinator of the Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities, will share her knowledge as a mother, experienced advocate, parent mentor and educator of individuals working with a mentally retarded or developmentally disabled child. Workshops for parents and professionals will be offered. For registration and information call Arc at 952-920-0855.

December 17
Advocating for the Health of Adolescents in Time of Drought. Keynote presenter, Dr. David Satcher, Research!America, a roundtable of research scientists and media professionals facilitated by Dr. Reed Tuckson, and an advocacy training seminar. Held at the McNamara Alumni Center, University of Minnesota. Free and open to the public. Contact Glynis Shea, 612-624-3772.

December 19
2003 Neighborhood Leadership Breakfast Series, at Gallery 8 Restaurant, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis to celebrate community leaders and their work on the city of Minneapolis. Presented by the Center for Neighborhoods, the League of Women Voters of Minneapolis, the Walker Art Center, and KFAI. Free and open to the public. Call 612-339-3480.Winter 2004

2004

January 9
Translating Attachment Theory into Practice, one of a series of four training sessions offered via ITV. Sponsored by the Center for Early Education and Development (CEED), UM. Visit http://education.umn.edu/CEED/events/#itv for more information.

January 21 (Andover)
Positive Parenting, a curriculum project of the University of Minnesota Extension Service. Register at www.parenting.umn.edu or call Kay Syme, 612-624-4938, ksyme@cce.umn.edu, or Kathleen Olson, 651-385-3110, kaolson@umn.edu

February 5
Observation of Infants, one of a series of four training sessions offered via ITV. Sponsored by the Center for Early Education and Development (CEED), UM. Visit http://education.umn.edu/

CYFC Advisory Council Discusses Marriage Movement

Bill Doherty, professor in Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota and one of the U's most visible faculty in the area of marriage and couple relationships, led a lively discussion on the growing "healthy marriage movement" at the fall meeting of the Children, Youth and Family Consortium's Advisory Council. Although some advisors expressed support for the healthy marriage movement, the majority expressed a range of concerns.

Doherty noted that these concerns mirror those being addressed by national and international leaders and researchers on the cutting edge of marriage as a field of study.

Several people raised the concern that marriage is not a panacea or policy solution for all of society's ills. Pushing marriage on couples who should not be married may create more problems than it resolves.

Considerable concern was expressed about what agenda is being promoted beneath the surface of the healthy marriage movement. Will it promote traditional gender roles? Will it be based in the beliefs of a particular faith tradition? Who will define what "healthy marriage" means? Will religious values regarding marriage be forced on those who choose to marry outside of faith communities? Currently, the marriage movement is perceived to be very closely aligned with conservative religious thought, although, in actuality, it has a much broader base of faith community representation.

The effect of the healthy marriage movement on those involved in same sex relationships, given that marriage is not now a legal option for them, was another area of concern.

How will "healthy marriage" be perceived by different ethnic and cultural communities within the U.S. and internationally? Cultures vary considerably in their views on marriage, gender roles within marriage, and how couples enter into marriage, for example. A wide range of ideological and cultural perspectives needs to be at the marriage discussion table.

A number of advisors were supportive of the marriage movement, but even some of their statements of support reflected inherent concerns.

The current movement has given permission for marriage to be on the public agenda, and to be discussed and debated openly by people of all political and social perspectives.

Marriage has become the focus of considerable academic research, after years of being on the back burner. Results of some of the research have been controversial, and need more exploring to validate the conclusions. One example is the research showing that children do better when they live with married, biological parents. Is it the marriage itself, or other factors related to the individuals or healthy family relationships in general that leads to children's well-being? Overall, however, the fact that a research agenda regarding marriage is becoming more accepted is seen as a positive outcome of the marriage movement.

Supporters also felt that a focus on the quality of the marriage relationship is a genuine attempt to improve outcomes for kids and promote healthy child development, and that more needs to be known and publicized about how the nature of the relationship between parents impacts their children's well-being.

Since a majority of high school students and young adults express the desire to have a healthy and long term marriage, a focus on marriage education is appropriate. In particular, addressing the sometimes unrealistic expectations of marriage may be a way to help couples get off to a stronger start.

In response to a question about the model programs or best practices that are informing federal policy efforts on marriage, Doherty said that there is a great window of opportunity for researchers and practitioners to enter the discussion right now. He encouraged advisors and colleagues to get involved, in part so the policies and the work around marriage are shaped by a balance of perspectives.

The discussion ended with suggestions for next steps: review the history of marriage while developing new working definitions; facilitate more reflective discussions like this one; explore how marriage impacts out of school time issues; and investigate appropriate ways to incorporate marriage into the Children's Summit series being coordinated by CYFC.

Marriage is one of several current areas of focus for CYFC's Policy Work Group.

Connection Corner

St. David's Symposium Features Children's Mental Health

Once again, CYFC was a co-sponsor of the annual St. David's Symposium now in its 12th year. The focus was early interventions for children's mental health, with featured speaker Dr. Ross A. Thompson from the University of California, Davis. Dr. Thompson addressed the quality of relationships that when knitted together make up a child's world, and how relationships build the intellectual, motivational and socio-emotional foundations for child's readiness for school and life. In break out sessions, attendees grappled with the best ways to support the socio-emotional development of children and families at risk and discussed how to create a mental health system for young children in Minnesota. The symposium was also co-sponsored by the University of Minnesota's Center for Early Education and Development and the Harris Center.

Shoulder to Shoulder

"Shoulder to Shoulder: Raising Teens Together" is a social marketing campaign developed by the public heath agencies in Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey and Scott Counties, the cities of Bloomington and Minneapolis along with the University of Minnesota Extension Service. It is based on research about raising adolescents, as well as a series of focus groups with parents throughout the metro area. The goal is to reach parents of teens with information and support. One component of the campaign is a 16 page booklet for parents of teens. More information is available on their website: www.shouldertoshoulderminnesota.org

National Council on Family Relations

The National Council on Family Relations, the only national professional organization for family scholars, researchers, faculty and practitioners, held its annual conference in mid-November on the topic of marriage. About 15 University of Minnesota faculty and graduate students presented at the

Consortium Update

The Center of Excellence in Children's Mental Health
The Center of Excellence in Children's Mental Health has begun its work as one of the action outcomes of the President's Initiative on Children, Youth and Families. Chaired by Dr. Marti Erickson and coordinated by Dr. Yvonne Godber, the idea for the Center originated in the community where leaders were looking for expertise from their land-grant university to help them address an issue that is at the top of their action agenda: children's mental and social-emotional well-being. The work includes over 60 University faculty and community leaders exploring community needs and specific strategies for collaboration on issues related to children's mental health. Eight age and issue specific work groups are co-led by university and community partners. The Center's formal kickoff will be Jan. 30.

Minnesota Children's Summit: Staying Strong Through Challenge and Change
The second in the series of three Children's Summits that will be held as part of the President's Initiative on Children, Youth and Families is scheduled for June 4, 2004. Focusing this year on middle childhood and the transition to adolescence, the Summit will feature University and community expertise on a variety of topics related to this age group. The Summit Planning Committee is chaired by Dr. W. Andrew Collins, professor with the Institute of Child Development.

Series of Mental Health Briefing Papers Now Complete
A series of five policy briefing papers on the broad topic of Mental Health and Families is now complete. Many university and community partners contributed to the papers Titles in the series include: Mental Health and Families, Mental Health in Infancy and Early Childhood, Mental Health in Childhood and Adolescence, Mental Health and Parenting, and Mental Health and Aging. The full briefing papers and one page summaries are available on CYFC's website at: http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/publications/briefings.html
A limited number of print copies are available.

CYFC Staff Changes
After serving 12 years as the director of CYFC, Marti Erickson has retired from that role and is serving as a senior fellow with CYFC, and co-chairing the President's Initiative on Children, Youth and Families. Jenny Keyser is serving as the Interim Director. Rebecca Reibestein, former office specialist who completed her Master's in Public Policy at the Humphrey Institute this spring, has been promoted to project coordinator with CYFC. She will be coordinating much of CYFC's work of the President's Initiative.

CEED/events/#itv for more information.

February 15 – 18 (San Diego)
Beyond School Hours VII. A Conference to promote the expansion of quality before and after school programs that are safe, improve achievement and offer positive social interaction in a healthy environment. For nonprofit, school, local, state and federal government, corporate, health and human services, volunteers, and philanthropic organizations. Contact conference@foundationsinc.org or 1-888-977-KIDS (5437).

March 6 & 13
Couples as Parents/Parents as Couples is a spring semester, 1 credit class from 9:00-4:00 on Saturdays, taught by Ted Bowman, an internationally recognized consultant who specializes in group facilitation methods. Research about the intersection of family roles of partners and parents will be scrutinized with emphasis placed on integrating this focus into parent and family education programs.

March 24 - 27
World Family Therapy Congress: Families in a Time of Global Crisis. Istanbul, Turkey. Through a series of plenaries and workshops involving participants in dialogue, this Congress will ask questions about what happens to families when immediate crisis passes, and what role does therapeutic help play. For registration and more information visit www.ifta2004.org or email aetder@superonline.com.

March 28 – 31
15th Annual National Service-Learning Conference, "Citizens Not Spectators: Fulfilling the Promise of Democracy," highlights service-learning pedagogy to inspire civic knowledge and active service in education and the community. Contact Rebecca Cape, 651-999-7365, http://www.nylc.org School of Public Health.
To be held at the Cowles Auditorium at the HHH Institute at the U of MN, visit http://www.cpheo.umn.edu/nutrition/ for more information.

April 1
Harris Forum 2004. Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D., dean, The Heller School for Social

Coming June 4, 2004

www.childrenssummit.umn.edu

On Line at - www.cyfc.umn.edu

Smart Marriages
http://www.smartmarriages.com

Smart Marriages is a web site from the Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education. CMFCE is an interest group whose participants believe that family breakdown can be reduced through education and information. The Coalition serves as a clearinghouse to help people find information they need to strengthen marriages and families - their own or those in their community. The Coalition (CMFCE) is an independent, non-partisan, non-denominational, non-sectarian organization.

Center for Law and Social Policy— Couples and Marriage Policy Section
http://www.clasp.org/Pubs/Pubs_Couples

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) was founded in 1968. Their web site features a special section on couples and marriage policy. Recent research documents have focused on what marriage means to successful child development as well as marriage related provisions in the welfare reauthorization act.

The National Marriage Project
http://marriage.rutgers.edu/

Housed at Rutgers University, The National Marriage Project aims to strengthen the institution of marriage by providing research and analysis that informs public policy, educates the American public, and focuses attention on the consequences of marriage decline.

Impacts of Marital Status and Parental Presence on the Material Hardship of Families with Children
http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=410538

Produced by the Urban Institute, this paper was prepared for the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. The paper answers these pressing questions as well as several others: How do levels of economic hardship among children vary by marital status and household living arrangements? In particular, what are the differences between married and unmarried two-parent families and between married couple families and families in which single parents are living with other adults? Do children in married couple families experience the same level of hardship as other children in families with the same level of income relative to needs? To what extent is marriage associated with lower levels of hardship among children of less-educated mothers?

National Council on Family Relations
http://www.ncfr.org/about_us/a_p_p_public_policy.asp

As a part of its policy work, NCFR has prepared a fact sheet on Marriage Promotion in Low Income Families, as well as a list of references. NCFR's recent newsletter to members, The Reporter, also focused entirely on the topic

Who's The Consortium?

Michael Benjamin, Executive Director of the National Council on Family Relations headquartered in Minneapolis, is an active member of the CYFC Advisory Council. NCFR is a professional association of family researchers, educators and practitioners, and publishes two journals: Journal of Marriage and Family and Journal of Family Relations. NCFR's annual conference held recently in Vancouver focused on "What Is The Future of Marriage?"

Yvonne Godber, Brian Henk and Zoë Wong have joined the staff of the CYFC. Yvonne is the coordinator of the Center of Excellence in Children's Mental Health and also teaches part time in Educational Psychology. Brian is a student working part time for CYFC providing technical support. Zoë is CYFC's new office specialist. Welcome to all three of them!

Brent Gish has recently joined the CYFC Advisory Council, and worked with the Steering Committee for the Children's Summit 2003. Brent hails from Mahnomen, Minnesota, where he is the superintendent of the Mahnomen Public Schools. He has been involved in public education for 31 years as classroom teacher and principal as well as superintendent. Brent's rural perspective is an enriching addition to the advisory council.

Jean King is associate professor in Educational Policy and Administration. Jean served as a faculty panelist for Capitol Conversations 2003, chaired the overall planning committee meeting for Capitol Conversations 2004, has volunteered to serve on the planning team for one of the 2004 Capitol Conversations, and is assisting CYFC in evaluating Capital Conversations. Jean has also contributed to an upcoming policy briefing paper on using research in policy

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