



AMTC

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News

“Fostering healthy families is the core of our strong programs and services. My personal and professional life are inseparable: it’s all about family.”

— ANGELA TURNER

AMTC News

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Family Is Our Core

A loving family sets the foundation for children who turn into secure and loving adults. At AMTC & Associates, fostering healthy families is the core of our strong programs and services. My personal and professional life are inseparable: it’s all about family.

As I reexamined my own assumptions about relationships, I was drawn to healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE). I was fortunate to grow up in a home with unconditional love, so I assumed that if a person finds a partner who is compatible, the rest will naturally fall into place. It’s not that easy, and relationships can be complex! A strong relationship takes work, having the ability to appreciate differences with mutual respect.

Many youths grow up without witnessing relationships built on friendship and respect. Abuse can also be present. This realization led me to partner with my colleagues to launch HMRE programs with our clients. We launched our first HMRE programs in Wisconsin in 2006 with the help of Jeanette Stevens, who remains closely connected to AMTC in her capacity as a program implementation consultant.

Seven of our current AMTC clients have implemented HMRE programs. In addition to building relationship skills, each of these clients include job preparation services as an integral programming component; home life affects one’s vocation.

In this newsletter, we provide a snapshot from two of our HMRE clients, **Family and Workforce Centers of America**, based in St. Louis, Missouri, and **Mission West Virginia**. We also highlight Jim Beer, a long-term AMTC consultant who provides program development and grant preparation.

From our AMTC family to yours, it is a privilege to serve. Please reach out to us if there is anything we can do for you. We invite you to be part of our family.

Angela Turner
Principal





FAMILY

A Call to Action

Building strong, stable families impacts entire communities and beyond.

“Family is the single greatest entity, the backbone of our society,” said Carolyn Seward, President and CEO of **Family and Workforce Centers of America (FWCA)**, located in St. Louis, Missouri. It’s not just a philosophy, but a call to action that is embodied by all FWCA staff. According to Seward, strong marriages and healthy relationships positively impact everyone, from individual families to entire communities, and beyond.

FWCA works to strengthen families through a holistic approach. This means not only teaching evidence-based, relationship-building curriculum (which is integral), but also empowering individuals through employment services and work readiness programs; being a productive family member positively affects relationships within a person’s home. (Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education is sponsored by a grant from the Office of Family Assistance, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.)

For FWCA, it’s about maximizing the number of people who receive their services. “The first thing we did is look at the target population, who we want to serve,” said Seward.

Whereas some organizations serve only certain segments of the population, FWCA wants to serve as many people as possible, including high school youth through adults, single parents, custodial and non-custodial fathers, married couples, engaged couples, veterans, immigrants and incarcerated fathers.

“We want to work with the entire family,” noted Seward. That is why programs focus on youth, too, so they can learn how to respect each other, make quality decisions, and communicate effectively while dating. The goal is for these skills to set a foundation for the rest of their lives. These same skills are also woven into the adult curriculum, and (as noted above) work in conjunction with vocational training. Economic stability and mobility strengthen individuals and families, including a better environment for young children whose formative years are largely affected by home life.

AMTC & Associates is an important partner who works closely with FWCA to implement quality programming. AMTC helps guide program implementation and evaluation by providing state of the art program fidelity and measurement

systems. “My work with AMTC has been extremely favorable,” said Seward. “They are very responsive and truly there to help work through any challenges, to put our best foot forward to serve our customers and move us forward.”

FWCA is certainly putting its best foot forward by looking to expand family programming through collaborations with other agencies, such as the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food stamps and the American Jobs Center. ■



Carolyn Seward, President and CEO of Family and Workforce Centers of America (FWCA)

REAL STORIES

of Real Change

Linda was in a tense relationship with her boyfriend, already at age 14, as a high school freshman in West Virginia. According to Linda, her then boyfriend was controlling to the extent that her life was in disarray. Thankfully, Linda's high school offered a Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Program (HMRE), implemented and coordinated by **Mission West Virginia**, an organization empowering youth and adults to foster healthy relationships/ marriages along with career advancement in the Appalachian region.

Linda tried incorporating the communication skills that she had learned in the program to improve the relationship with her boyfriend. Still, Linda felt that the relationship was becoming too severe and complicated, particularly for someone her age; sometimes the best recourse is to end an unhealthy relationship. Linda found the courage to do so, and by using her newfound skills, built a healthy relationship with someone else based on common interests and understanding.

Next, meet Molly, who tiredly arrived to her first session at a Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education workshop and remained quiet for most of the morning—until the discussion turned to dangerous patterns in relationships. Molly was then in a violent and controlling relationship and had been for years. She shared her story with other participants and found herself surrounded by a group of supportive women. A fellow participant found herself in a similar situation; the two bonded and are close-knit to this day.

The curriculum and handouts made an indelible impression, including the topic of domestic violence. Molly worked to extricate herself from the relationship and is working toward her GED and applying for jobs. Molly is even helping the person with whom she bonded to leave her abusive relationship. Thanks to the workshop, Molly is now able to serve in a supportive role as well.

Programs like these empower individuals to make healthy decisions and work towards productive goals. And it's working. ■

HMRE is sponsored by a grant from the Office of Family Assistance, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. The names of the two women have been altered to protect their privacy. All other information is factual.



Torri Childs, a Field Research Associate for AMTC, has worked closely with Mission West Virginia.

Why HMRE PROGRAMS Are Important

Here are some key findings from two studies of HMRE programs.

HMRE programs:

- improved couples' relationship quality, including commitment, support and affection,
- helped couples avoid destructive conflict,
- increased likelihood that couples were married at one-year follow-up,
- improved co-parenting, based on degree to which couples believed they worked well together in raising child(ren).

Source: A Family-Strengthening Program for Low-Income Families: Final Impacts from the Supporting Healthy Marriage Evaluation, MDRC, 2014

- Participating couples had higher levels of marital happiness; less distress and infidelity; more warmth, support, and positive communication; fewer antagonistic and hostile behaviors in their interactions; and less psychological abuse.
- Women had reduced feelings of sadness and anxiety. This is of interest because parental distress is linked with less positive parenting and with increased behavior problems for children.

Source: Effects of Two Healthy Marriage Programs for Low-Income Couples: Evidence from the Parents and Children Together Evaluation, Mathematica, 2019

Meet one of our *Associates*



JIM BEER, PhD

PLANNING & GRANT WRITING ASSOCIATE

WITH AMTC SINCE 2010

EDUCATION: State University of New York, Regents College; Kansas State University; Purdue University

When did you start working with AMTC & Associates?

I started working with AMTC in 2010.

What is your educational background?

I have a PhD in marriage and family therapy.

What is your role at AMTC?

My role is mainly planning, program development and grant preparation. After grants are awarded, I examine a lot of data in regards to community outcomes. For example, I will examine the teen birth rate for AMTC clients who are vested in teen pregnancy prevention.

My grant writing is not limited to teen pregnancy prevention; I've written grants in other areas as well. I've also done some implementation work along with data analysis.

What do you find meaningful about your work with AMTC?

AMTC tries to address some important problems in society and tries to help people get their lives on track.

I hope that contributing to this work is what God wants me to do, making this a better place to live.

What are some of the biggest challenges that you encounter in regard to your work for AMTC?

I work with clients and people in other cities who are far away, so I must be able to understand what it is they do, and what they want to do, so that I can make a convincing case in a grant application.

What do you hope to accomplish with your work as it moves forward for AMTC?

I hope to help AMTC and their clients receive funding and resources, furthering their good work to help people.

Outside of work, what do you enjoy?

I am involved in my congregational community; I enjoy that and learning more about Judaism. I like reading, the outdoors and travel.

HMRE RESOURCES

Here are two great sources of information on healthy marriage and relationship education:

National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families

www.healthymarriageandfamilies.org

The Resource Center supports state and local safety net service providers as they integrate healthy marriage and relationship education skills into service delivery systems as part of a comprehensive, culturally appropriate, family-centered approach designed to promote self-sufficiency and improve family well-being.

What you'll find here:

- Training courses
- Resource library
- News and research reports
- Listing of safety net organizations
- Calendar of related events
- Strategies for integrating available resources

The Dibble Institute

www.dibbleinstitute.org

The non-profit Dibble Institute promotes relationship training for youth—especially in the context of dating and romantic connections. Its goal is to help young people build a foundation for healthy romantic relationships now, and for lasting, positive family environments in the future.

What you'll find here:

- Relationship curricula
- Professional development courses
- Webinar archives
- Case studies
- Tool kits
- Grant alerts