



AMTC

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News

“AMTC & Associates takes a broad approach to poverty by focusing on stabilizing the entire family... Together, we have an opportunity to address some of our society’s toughest issues and to make a positive impact.”

— ANGELA TURNER

AMTC News

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Stabilizing Families by Overcoming Poverty

Poverty is a major barrier for parents in caring for their children. Economic hardship interferes with a family’s ability to provide basic resources. This can lead to negative outcomes for children, such as poor health for those who might not receive proper nourishment and medical care. Factors that are not as widely known—but no less important—are the social and emotional impacts of poverty. For example, living in poverty is linked to depression, parental stress and family dysfunction.

AMTC & Associates takes a broad approach to poverty by focusing on stabilizing the entire family. AMTC assists our clients in implementing positive youth development programs, including pregnancy prevention and healthy relationship education. We also work with adults to assist with parenting, as well as healthy relationship and marriage education programs. For families involved in the justice systems, juvenile or adult, our clients offer holistic community reentry programs. Programs to combat substance abuse and address mental health issues are also integral.

This newsletter addresses the importance of forming healthy relationships to lessen social poverty, with input from Marline Pearson, an author, professor and curricula developer. An additional article speaks to the issue of fragile families and their challenges and hopes. It is based on a study by researcher Cynthia Osborne. Both Osborne and Pearson work with AMTC and are featured at the end of this newsletter.

Together, we have an opportunity to address some of our society’s toughest issues and to make a positive impact. Let us know how we might be able to help your organization.

Angela Turner
Principal





POVERTY:

Both Economic & Social

Successful life outcomes are strongly associated with healthy families; in comparison, children in unstable and/or strained parental relationships face tremendous hurdles to emotional, social and physical wellbeing. So do the parents. These family structures are prone to poverty, both economically and socially. Both these elements of poverty must be addressed in family strengthening programs by teaching how to cultivate relationships and prepare for and attain steady employment.

A Hunger for Connection

Having been involved in prevention work for much of her life, author and educator Marline Pearson understands that poverty is as much about economic resources as it is about social impoverishment. “There is a hunger for human connection—

for loving, committed relationships. A healthy, romantic, stable relationship and community connections are as crucial as the basic necessities of food, housing, education, and work.” The decline of these relationships has taken a significant toll, noted Pearson. “Depression and suicide may be the starkest indicators.”

Pearson authored and teaches evidence-based curricula (used throughout the U.S.) to build knowledge and skills for successful relationships. Helping teens and young adults navigate their love lives wisely—including sexual decision-making—can help them achieve their life goals. Her programs use innovative approaches for pregnancy and dating violence prevention that are embedded in comprehensive relationship education.

“From the many years I’ve spent listening to my students’ stories—what they’ve struggled with, their hurts—I was convinced that we were ignoring a critical piece: deep desires for connection, for love, for healthy relationships, marriages and family,” explained Pearson. “Unstable, unhealthy, and dangerous intimate relationships tend to derail young people from achieving goals in school, employment and parenting.” Social poverty is real.

Poverty Indicators

Several correlations link family and poverty. Healthy and stable family structures correspond to higher academic success and a lower likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system. Parents with higher degrees of education are more likely to marry, less likely to divorce, report a higher quality of marriage, avoid non-marital births and tend to have higher incomes. All young people need greater access to education, work that pays, and pathways to healthy relationships.

The stakes are high and there is much work ahead, but thanks to Pearson and family strengthening programs around the country, the future can be bright. ■

How organizations can help develop

STRONGER FAMILIES



Parenting

- Teach parents about parenting research and child development needs.
- Teach effective parenting skills, including appropriate forms of discipline.

Healthy Relationships

- Increase parental relationship skills—between married parents as well as non-married parents who co-parent.

Economic Stability

- Assist families with providing basic needs through job skills and job search assistance; provide help with emergency needs.

Child Development

- Offer youth risk avoidance programs and increase strengths in youth that protect against risk behaviors.
- Help build social and emotional competencies in children.

Fragile Families

Overcoming Barriers

Fragile Families: Babies born to unmarried parents have an increased likelihood for social, emotional and physical challenges. Unmarried parents are more likely to live in poverty and be involved in unhealthy relationships. These challenges lead to increased risks for children such as behavioral and academic problems—just the tip of the iceberg.

More than 40% of all babies are born into single-parent families in the U.S.¹ The rate is significantly worse for minorities: 70% of African-American babies and 50% of Hispanic babies. These correlations have been suggested by a number of studies, including the *Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study*. Co-authored by Cynthia Osborne, a longtime research partner with AMTC, the urban study followed approximately 5,000 children who were born to unmarried couples between 1998 and 2000.

A Reason for Hope

While these statistics are alarming, the same study offers hope: "...interventions designed to improve relationship skills among parents may improve outcomes for children regardless of parents' relationship status."² Federal family strengthening programs can change the tide. AMTC & Associates and its clients are doing their utmost to extricate families that have fallen into these statistics.

Specifically, AMTC works hand in hand with clients to implement and evaluate pregnancy prevention and healthy relationship programs that include an integral component called a "successful life sequence"; that is, reaching certain benchmarks sequentially prior to starting a family.

Increasing Best Outcomes

For parents who already have children, the programs also address parenting, co-parenting and economic stability programs to increase the best outcomes for children. When parents are absent due to incarceration, programming assists with reintegration into society with job skills and a steady role in their children's lives.

Each person is precious. AMTC and their clients know this full well and are doing something about it! ■

^{1,2} Osborne, Cynthia and Nora Ankrum. (2015). Understanding Today's Changing Families. *Family Court Review*, Volume 53(2), pp. 221-232.



RESOURCES

for Strengthening Families

Federal Assistance Programs:

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, from USDA):**
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program>
- **The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC, from IRS):** substantial support to low- and moderate-income working parents.
<https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/earned-income-tax-credit>
- **The Child Tax Credit (CTC, IRS):** up to \$2,000 per qualifying child under 17.
<https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/ten-facts-about-the-child-tax-credit>
- **Medicaid (HHS):** health coverage for low-income adults, children, pregnant women, the elderly and people with disabilities.
<https://www.medicare.gov/medicaid/index.html>
- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF, HHS):** assistance with childcare; promotion of job preparation, work and marriage; prevention of teen pregnancy and encouraging two-parent families.
<https://www.hhs.gov/answers/programs-for-families-and-children/what-is-tanf/index.html>

Private Community Programs:

- **Local YMCAs or YWCAs** offer programs such as swimming, parents' night out, free childcare during workouts, story time, family open gym, music and movement, and camp.
- **Boys and Girls Clubs** provide low-cost child development, including after-school tutoring, DIY STEM and money matters.
- **Libraries** often provide educational programming such as reading contests, crafting events and family events.
- **Other local family support programs** are offered through universities and health departments.

Meet our *Partners*

Our diverse team delivers fast, relevant results for our clients. Here are two of our partners who work to strengthen families.



MARLINE PEARSON

Community College Instructor,
Madison Area Technical College
Author, *Love Notes Relationship
Smarts Plus*
Co-author, *Within My Reach*

How many years have you collaborated with AMTC?
Approximately 10 years.

How many years have you been working in the field of relationship education?
15 years.

What do you find meaningful about your work?
Helping youth appreciate the connection and benefits of having a safe, healthy, and committed partner, i.e., a spouse, with whom to raise a child. For those who do not wish to start a family, avoiding unintended pregnancy is key. Putting children before a committed relationship carries serious disadvantages.

I hope to contribute to a paradigm shift for sex education/pregnancy/STI prevention as a more holistic approach, with robust healthy relationship education. I want all program directors to understand: *Transformational change comes through relationships.* I have never seen a program or service **alone** that turns a life around.

What have been your greatest accomplishments thus far?
Developing a new kind of comprehensive program that adds important missing pieces of prevention and healing for vulnerable youth. University of Louisville researchers completed a five-year random control trial on *Love Notes* that found a 46% decrease in pregnancy as compared to the control group (better than *any* program ever evaluated by the federal government), while also achieving other significant outcomes.



CYNTHIA OSBORNE

Director, Child and Family
Research Partnership
Associate Dean for Academic
Strategies and Associate
Professor, Lyndon B. Johnson
School of Public Affairs,
University of Texas at Austin

How many years have you collaborated with AMTC?
3 years.

How many years have you been working in your field?
25 years.

What do you find meaningful about your work?
I taught in a low-income school and there was a lot going on in my students' lives that was affecting their ability to really engage with their school day, whether it was a family member moving in or out, someone returning from being incarcerated, or criminal activity in neighborhoods. I wanted to learn more about that, to explore how the roles of policy, families, neighborhood, and communities all intersect to strengthen the system of care that we provide for our families.

I enjoy working with organizations that aim to strengthen children and families and helping them provide services that are optimal. Through evaluation research and consultation, my goal is to provide meaningful feedback to help them strengthen their services. I also strive to better understand what we know about policies and programs to strengthen children and families.

What have been your greatest accomplishments thus far?
I feel that my greatest accomplishment is building long-term, trusted relationships between partners. Being evaluated often makes organizations feel vulnerable. I am glad to have the opportunity to work closely with the partners I evaluate to help them improve their programs.