

# Heritage Keepers Healthy Marriage Initiative Tackles Complex Crisis

## **Issue:**

Too many South Carolina (SC) children are born to unmarried mothers and into economic and social hardships that last a lifetime. In some instances, the parents of these children live together in a marriage-like relationship. In others, the mother and father have a close relationship but the father lives apart. In still other cases, the father has little or no contact with either his child or his child's mother.

Look no further than this state to view the consequences of chaotic family formation and appreciate the need for changing attitudes about marriage and for developing marriage skills. According to *SC Kids Count* and the *SC Statistical Abstract*:

- 40% of all babies are born out-of-wedlock;
- 69% of African-American/Other and 24% of white babies are born to single mothers;
- SC is 41<sup>st</sup> in teen birth rate;
- Nearly 15,000 SC families annually opt for the panacea of divorce;
- Divorce affects more than 12,100 children annually; and
- 40% of the state's children in single-parent families live in poverty.

Clearly, SC's communities face family formation problems of an enormous scope.

## **Intervention:**

*Heritage Keepers Healthy Marriage Initiative* is Heritage Community Services' (Heritage's) Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI). It exists to help couples – who have chosen marriage for themselves – gain greater access to marriage education services where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage. *Heritage Keepers Healthy Marriage Initiative* has four major components:

- Community activities focus on training and technical assistance for faith-based (FBOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs), and other agencies interested in strengthening their capability to provide marriage education services. It also conducts intensive healthy marriage and healthy marriage education demonstration and research projects.
- CPC/Clinic activities focus on crisis pregnancy centers to help them provide marriage education services to their clients.
- African American and Hispanic HMIs activities will promote and strengthen healthy marriages within the African American and Hispanic communities by addressing their unique cultural, linguistic, demographic, and socio-economic needs.

## **Impact:**

- *Heritage Keepers Healthy Marriage Initiative* trained more than 75 SC FBOs and CBOs in 2005.
- *Heritage Keepers Healthy Marriage Initiative* trained 120 SC marriage mentor couples in 2005.
- *Heritage Keepers Healthy Marriage Initiative* receives 4-year contract from US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to foster healthy marriages in an underserved community in Charleston.
- HHS designates *Heritage Keepers Healthy Marriage Initiative* as a healthy marriage 'best practice' location.

## **Contact:**

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