

# LINKS (Lasting Intimacy through Nurturing, Knowledge, and Skills)

## Written by John Van Epp, Ph.D.

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(Allowable Activity 5, Marriage enhancement and marriage skills training) --LINKS is offered as an eight (+) hour program.

**Description:** The LINKS program (Lasting Intimacy through Nurturing, Knowledge & Skills), like its predecessor PICK-a Partner, has a foundation in major areas of research on: intimacy and romantic love; how trust is developed and maintained; forgiveness in marital relations; resiliency and commitment in marriage; emotional styles and expression in marriage; attachment/closeness in adult relationships; sexual intimacy in marriage; personal boundaries and affairs; and predictors of marital satisfaction. Those participants who attend the LINKS program learn the LINKS marital maintenance meeting—an essential meeting that you can use in your marriage to regularly strengthen the five dynamics of the RAM (Relationship Attachment Model). The goal is to keep the marriage relationship strong and reveal potential problems long before they dampen the intimacy of marriage.

*This program, as presented by the MHMC is a secular non-religious program that complies with 45 CFR 87.1, Equal Treatment for Faith-Based Organizations. All participation is voluntary.*

### Table of Contents:

- Session One
  - 1. Five Principles of the RAM
  - 2. Formula for "Knowing"
  - 3. Talk Time
- Session Two
  - 1. Your Actions are Important, But so is Your Attitude
  - 2. How You Become Resentful
  - 3. Replacing Resentments with Respect
  - 4. Healing the Hurts of Disappointments & Broken Trust
- Session Three
  - 1. The Give and Take of Love
  - 2. Making Irritating Differences Benefit Your Relationship
  - 3. Keeping Your Relationship a Priority
  - 4. Description of the Top Ten Intimacy Activities
- Session Four
  - 1. Being Secure with Belonging to Your Spouse
  - 2. Becoming Stronger from the Times of Testing
  - 3. Putting Your Commitment into Action
- Session Five
  - 1. What is Your Sex Drive?
  - 2. What Turns You On?
  - 3. How do You Spell Romance?

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4. Is Sex a Physical or Emotional Activity?
5. Good Sex: A Meeting of the Minds (and Bodies)

### Program Staffing:

- Provide information on staff that helped implement your program’s marriage enhancement activities during the final year of funding. You may include key staff and volunteers who were critical to the implementation of the program. Also indicate the time period in which they contributed to the program. **(See table below. Add additional lines if needed)**

Staff Name	Official Job Title/Position	% of time devoted to this activity	Time period involved
Bob Pletcher, LLPC	United Way of Jackson County- MHMC Senior Project Leader	10%	11/1/09 - 10/31/10
Karen Hulett	United Way of Jackson County- Project Assistant	15%	11/1/09 - 10/31/10
Kylee Miller	Marriage Matters Jackson- Workshop Manager	25%	11/1/09 - 10/31/10
Julie Bock, CME	Marriage Resource Center- Executive Director	3%	11/1/09 - 10/31/10
Amanda Williamson	Marriage Resource Center- Office Manager	3%	11/1/09 - 10/31/10
Sandra Zahrfeld	Marriage Resource Center- Marr. Educ. Coordinator	25%	11/1/09 - 5/31/10
Kimberly Austin	Marriage Resource Center- Marr. Educ. Coordinator	25%	6/30/10- 10/31/10
Steven Hernandez	Marriages That Work- Co-Director- Program Development	5%	11/1/09 - 10/31/10
Kellie Slusher	Marriages That Work- Program Coordinator	25%	6/30/10- 10/31/10
Kelly Sigler, LLPC	Marriages That Work- Program Instructor	40%	11/1/09 - 3/31/10

- List key staff positions that experienced turnover during the 5-year funding period. Provide reasons for turnover (if applicable).

During Year 3, The Marriage Resource Center had to hire a new Marriage Education Coordinator when their previous part-time staff had opportunity to accept the same position fulltime at another core Partner, Marriages That Work. He was replaced by a person who struggled for several months to understand the responsibilities, until she resigned midway through Yr 4. She was replaced by a skilled facilitator who moved from a contractor role to staff for the remainder of the grant period.

In Year 2, Marriage Matters Jackson contracted with Community Action Agency to provide nearly all their workshops and meet their participant-served goals. When that CAA staffer was hired by UWJC to become the MHMC Project Director, MMJ hired their own Marriage Education Recruiter/Coordinator. Unfortunately, his performance was unsatisfactory, and he was replaced in Year 3 by a person who continued throughout the grant.

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**Partnerships:** Describe any collaborative partners involved in implementing the marriage enhancement program and their role(s) in helping the program reach its goals.

- The Marriage Resource Center pioneered an unique opportunity to serve an incarcerated population in Allowable Activity 5. The Chelsea Special Alternative Incarceration facility is a "boot camp" program for inmates that are only incarcerated for short sentences. The Assistant Warden received LINKS training from the MHMC, and seeing its value, allowed inmate's wives and significant others to join the men on the grounds, and attend LINKS training as couples.
- The Marriage Resource Center in Wayne County is highly committed to outreach into their multicultural TANF population through numerous and creative partnerships with human service agencies and faith-based organizations, particularly African-American churches. Nearly every workshop they offer is through a partnership with another organization.

**Outputs:** In the chart below, please list activities you implemented related to marriage enhancement, the number of individuals your program served through each activity during each budget period, and the total number of individuals served through each activity during the entire duration of the grant.

Allowable Activity Area	Activity	Number served in FY 2007 <sup>i</sup> (Nov. 1, 2006- Oct. 31, 2007)	Number served in FY 2008 <sup>i</sup> (Nov. 1, 2007- Oct. 31, 2008)	Number served in FY 2009 <sup>i</sup> (Nov. 1, 2008- Oct. 31, 2009)	Number served in FY 2010 <sup>i</sup> (Nov. 1, 2009- Oct. 31, 2010)	Number served in FY 2011 <sup>i</sup> (Nov. 1, 2010- Oct. 31, 2011)	Number served since award date <sup>iii</sup>
5 (Married or Established couples)	Deliver healthy relationship education curriculum	4 couples	468 couples	237 couples	292 couples	N/A	1001 couples

**Note:** Numbers served include some individuals served in years 1 & 2 when individuals were still included in AA-5 numbers

**C. Strengths:** List factors that helped support the implementation of your marriage enhancement activities.

- Excellent facilitators who are charismatic and gifted public speakers, several with advanced degrees and professional licensure and experience
- Commitment to details when planning workshops, retreats, and other AA-5 events, resulting in a high quality product and experience. Participants wanted to return and/or refer their family and friends
- Varied and constant creative promotion

**D. Challenges/barriers:**

- List challenges that you encountered in implementing your program's marriage enhancement activities.
- Were you able to overcome or adapt to these challenges? Explain why or why not.

By definition, when reaching couples, you are trying to attract men, who are reticent to lend their attendance and involvement to public relationship activities. Women will tell us they want to come but they don't think their husbands would feel comfortable. Fears include: sharing personal things, having to talk in public, will it be girly? We listened and made sure the events and workshops we offered were both male and female friendly. Assuring couples that they share at their comfort level or not at all is a great selling point.

Helping couples invest in their marriage and relationship is a priority for the MHMC. MMJ found success in strengthening marriages by offering entertaining date nights in an effort to help couples invest in their marriages. In many cases, coming to a fun and informative event in an engaging venue starts conversations in the marriage that might have otherwise been ignored until it got to a place of trouble or dysfunction. Tackling sensitive subjects in an enjoyable setting has an amazing positive effect on couples with far-reaching impact to their children and to the community as a whole. The success of MMJ led the other core Partners to follow their lead in organizing Allowable Activity 5 couples workshops.

Food & Fun are absolute MUSTS! No one is interested in just a lecture and food is always an attraction, particularly for men. Venue matters- just as no one wants to sit and listen to a boring lecture, people don't want to sit in sterile clinical settings to experience and learn something that is supposed to nurture a renewed sense of hope and fun into relationships at any stage. Coffee shops, restaurants, comfy community centers or lounges give the sense that marriage education is easily adaptable into the places of their everyday life.

### E. Contextual Events:

- Contextual events or community changes influencing the success or challenges related to your program's marriage enhancement activities.
- Describe how the community/program participants reacted to your marriage enhancement program. Were they supportive or unsupportive? Were there any concerns? Was there any resistance or reluctance to participate?

At the outset of our Healthy Marriage Initiative Demonstration Project in 2006, major media outlets were already describing Michigan as experiencing "a one-state recession". As national economic indicators have fallen in the last four years, Michigan has unfortunately continued to lead ahead of this dubious curve.

#### ***Probable Negative Impact on our Project:***

- Increased stress on marriages and families
- Less ability to "invest" time/money into marriage
- Arrangements to attend Healthy Marriage activities, babysitting, gas money, etc., more difficult
- Cost of offering Healthy Marriage activities increases because vendors/partners are less able to offer free/reduced cost for their services
- Many couples have intention of marriage, but wait until they become more financially and professionally secure- now a more difficult objective

#### ***Probable Positive Impact on our Project:***

- Some couples are more reluctant to incur costs of divorce and supporting two households, and become more willing to seek a goal of reconciliation
- Some couples under increased stress seek out assistance

### F. Lessons learned:

- What did you learn about how to deal with challenges regarding these activities?
- What did you learn about the strengths and supports that were available to help facilitate these activities?
- How successful would you say that this type of program was in educating individuals about healthy marriage in general?

We have found that there is a stigma to “Marriage Counseling” that gives counselors, clergy and judges a bad rap. Couples don’t turn to them until things are at a crisis point, or worse, into catastrophe. This is the point when many couples show up and just want a counselor to validate that they are beyond repair and divorce is imminent. Insert marriage education, which is a non-threatening, proactive solution. Counselors, clergy and judges love us - they have been starving for something else to help couples before it gets to the point of no return.

Price point on services is crucial. We found things have to be high quality but not prohibitively expensive to couples. Getting underwriting or sponsorships for about half the couple cost of workshops is very helpful to start with. For those in dire circumstances scholarships are very important but even then participants need to contribute a small portion of the cost to see the real value in what they are receiving. Another lesson learned is that divorced people aren’t threatened by us promoting the value of a healthy marriage. Many have approached us thanking us for the message of health and hope that we offer to their kids and to the community as a whole.

### 2. Overview of the Evaluation *(Note: This section only to be completed if applicable)*

If your program used an evaluation design to measure change or impact, describe the data collection procedures, problems encountered in the implementation of the evaluation plan, and evaluation findings. We have provided questions under each heading to help guide you in providing relevant information for this section.

#### Data Collection

- **Outputs:** *Describe outputs measured in your program (see logic model, if applicable). \*Note: An output is the product or service your organization provided or produced.*
- **Outcomes:** *Describe outcomes measured in your program (see logic model, if applicable). \*Note: An outcome is the effect or change in your target population resulting from the outputs you provided.*

**Tools and Instruments** *(if applicable): This includes surveys, scales, focus groups, intake forms used to collect information for evaluation purposes. Describe how these tools were used to measure your outcomes. Include the following information:*

- **Name of the tool/instrument:** *Give the official name of the tool/instrument used*
- **Purpose of the tool/instrument:** *What does it measure?*

- **When used:** *When were intake forms completed?; At what point in the program were focus groups administered?; When were follow-up surveys conducted?*
- **How often:** *How often were surveys administered?; How often did you collect follow-up data?*
- **By whom:** *Who was responsible for administering surveys?; Who conducted focus groups?*

### **Michigan Healthy Marriage Evaluation Complete Grant Report**

Written by evaluator: EPPC Global Management, Inc., Dr. Stephen Rollin, Ed.D.

The Michigan Healthy Marriage Coalition covers three counties in Michigan that include Jackson, Lenawee and Wayne. The participants who have received the services include both incarcerated and non-incarcerated individuals and couples. Pre and Post test data is available for three of the five programs that were used. Those programs are: Links, PICK, and PREP. No testing data is available for Connections and Third Option Curriculum because of the open format in which they are taught and therefore not amenable to a pre post test format.

For this grant, the numbers for “reached” reflects those who attended at least one class while “served” reflects those who attended eight hours or more and the number for “completed” attended eight hours and completed 75% or more of the class.

All In all, the Coalition reached 10,400 individuals and served 10382 with 693 total classes offered. Of these participants, 561 were reached in more than one curriculum leaving 9839 unduplicated reached participants. There were 1079 unduplicated couples reached and 7681 individuals who attended a class without a partner. Of this group, 4614 (47%) came from the prison population and the remaining 53% were drawn from a population of non-incarcerated individuals and couples. There were 51 prisoner couples who were granted special permission for the spouse to attend a PREP or LINKS class with their incarcerated partner.

Overall, Jackson reached 2246 (23%) participants, Lenawee reached 4911 (50%), and Wayne reached 2682 (27%) of the unduplicated participant base. Of these, Jackson served only community-based participants while 89% of Lenawee’s and 11% of Wayne’s participant were incarcerated.

#### **Demographic Data—**

Gender for the Coalition is as follows: 6583 (67%) were male with 3225 (33%) females. Of these, 4397 of the males were prisoners with 214 of the females being either a prisoner or spouse of a prisoner. There were 3555 (42%) African Americans with 1878 being prisoners, 3965 (47%) Caucasian participants with 1958 prisoners and 347 (4%) were Hispanic participants with 238 prisoners. The remainder known 8% participants was American Indian, Asian, and Bi-racial or Other.

Age was determined for a participant at the time of their initial enrollment. Age was known for 7849 participants. There were 1862 (24%) for ages 13-19, 3634 (46%) for the 20-35 age group, 2002 (26%) for ages 36-56 with 351 (4%) 56 years or older.



There were a total of 2731 (51%) TANF eligible participants from the known TANF data, including 1723 TANF eligible participants from the prison population. There were 3368 (38%) participants who stated they were single of which 2056 were incarcerated, while 1267 (14%) indicated they were dating which represented 831 who were prisoners. One thousand and forty-three (11%) of the participants stated they were either engaged or cohabitating with 741 of these being prisoners. Three-hundred and eighty-two of the 2496 (28%) married participants were prisoners while 362 of the 736 (8%) who were divorced or separated individuals were prisoners. One percent of the known marital status stated “Other” as their status.

### ***Overview of the Evaluation—***

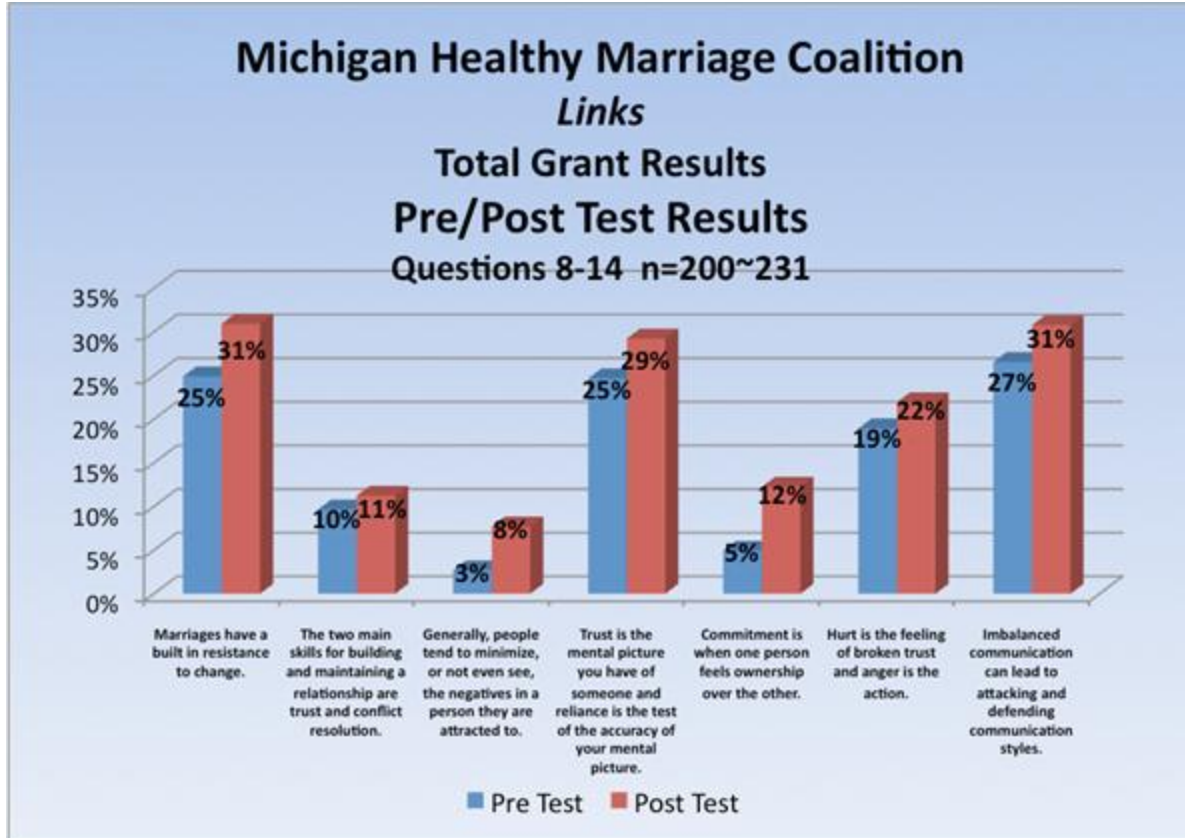
The logic model used to evaluate this program focused on the measurement of the percentage of change from pre to post. Data was collected by facilitators or staff at the beginning of each activity and immediately at the end of each program workshop. The outputs for the program included the acquisition of knowledge derived from the individual training units, client satisfaction with the program, and marketing outreach. The outcomes focused on a positive increase in knowledge pre to post, positive satisfaction with the program including the quality of the information, the quality of the presentation and the applicability of the program to their lives and finally the number of individuals reached through an extensive marketing campaign.

### ***Tools and instruments—***

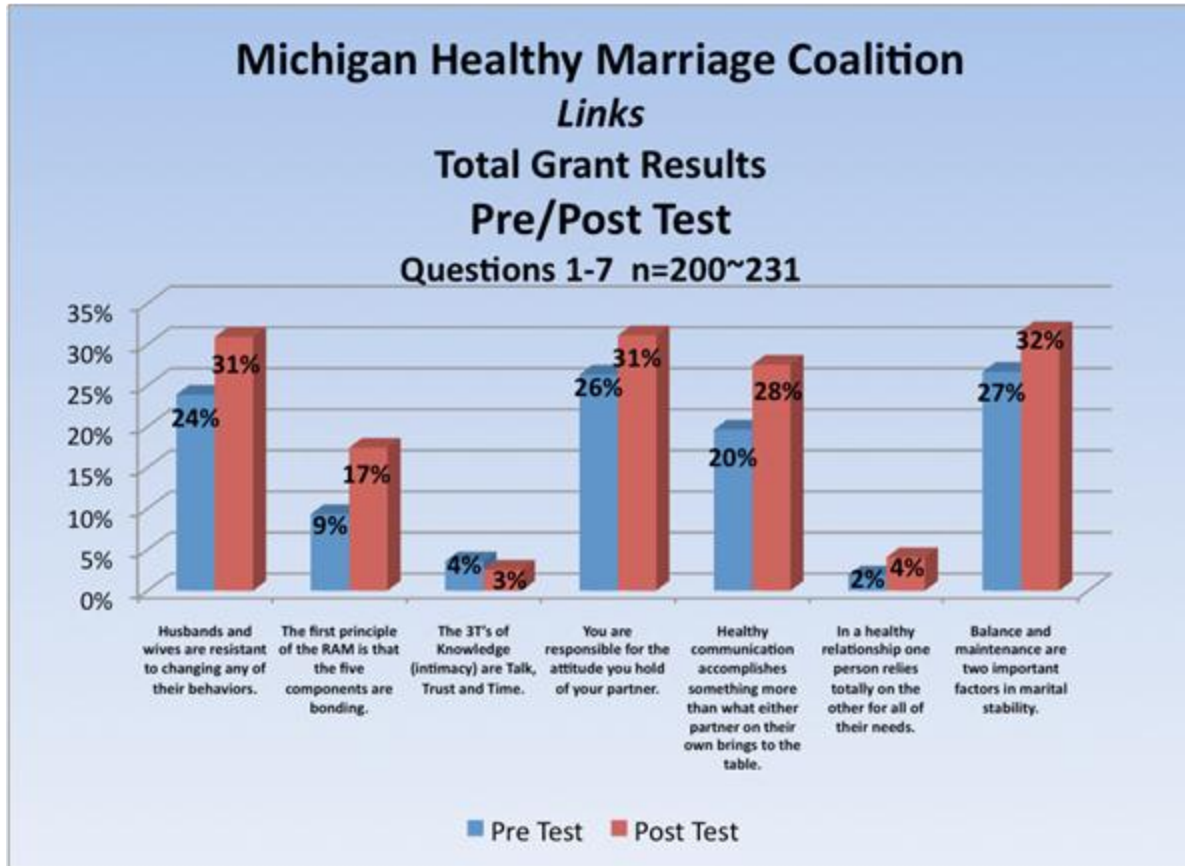
The names of the instruments used are as follows: PICK, PREP, and LINKS pre and post tests. The same test was given prior to and after the completion of a class and the difference from pre to post was measured. Pre and post testing was not an option for Connections and 3rd Option because of the open format in which the curriculum was delivered. These instruments measured the gain or loss in knowledge for each curricula offering. The client satisfaction survey was developed by the evaluators and was based on traditional surveys featured in satisfaction survey literature. This instrument measured the recipient’s satisfaction with the workshop. The workshop pre-test tools were given at the beginning of the program along with registration forms. The post test was given at the conclusion of the training session along with the client satisfaction form, and in years three and four, an Immediate Outcomes survey. Typically, the instructor of each class was responsible for the administration of all workshop surveys. In years three and four, follow up Intermediate Outcome surveys were given to community participants 6-12 months after being served. Staff would administrate the Intermediate Outcome follow up surveys through dinner/reunion events, email, and phone. Focus groups were not held during the life of this grant.

### ***Individual Impact—***

The attached charts clearly suggest that there was a significant change in the desired direction in attitudes and knowledge of the recipients in nearly all categories. One always needs to be aware of issues around ceiling effect particularly when it relates to measures of attitudes. One can only infer from the data that there were positive changes in behaviors. Direct observations of behavioral changes were not made by the evaluator.







**State how the individuals (or clients) your program served were impacted as a result of this program**

In Grant Year 3, MHMC began conducting Intermediate Outcomes surveys to participant served within the previous semiannual report period. Thus, the surveys were conducted 6-12 months after exposure to the relationship skills instruction. Some of the data gleaned concerning individual-level impact:

- ✓ 262 surveys completed
- ✓ 135 (52%) reported increased skills in Communication
- ✓ 190 (73%) reported increased skills in Conflict Resolution
- ✓ 58 (22%) reported increased skills in Abuse Prevention
- ✓ 238 (91%) reported increased confidence in their ability to have a healthy marriage
- ✓ 163 (62%) reported increased commitment to their relationship
- ✓ 159 (61%) reported improvement in their relationship

**Michigan Healthy Marriage Coalition PROGRAM RETURN ON INVESTMENT**

## Michigan Healthy Marriage Coalition

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<i>November 1, 2006 – October 31, 2010</i>				
<u>A-A</u>	<u>PROGRAM</u>	<u>PARTICIPANTS</u>	<u>ANNUAL SAVINGS</u>	<u>LIFETIME SAVINGS</u>
AA-2	<i>Connections</i>	<i>9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> Grade</i>	<i>\$2,083,821</i>	<i>\$10,945,073</i>
AA-4	<i>P.I.C.K.-A-Partner</i>	<i>Singles/Single Again</i>	<i>\$3,599,914</i>	<i>\$15,777,661</i>
AA-5	<i>PREP/L.I.N.K.S</i>	<i>Couples Enrichment</i>	<i>\$3,174,154</i>	<i>\$106,084,893</i>
AA-6	<i>Third Option</i>	<i>Troubled Couples</i>	<i>\$341,487</i>	<i>\$8,645,610</i>
AA-4	<i>P.I.C.K.-A-Partner</i>	<i>Inmates</i>	<i>4 year avg. sentence =</i>	<i>\$45,122,400</i>

What better method to reflect on the success of this Healthy Marriage Demonstration Project: After ACF/OFC invested approximately \$4.4 million dollars, they and southern Michigan received the benefit of \$9,199,376 immediate annual savings, and \$186,575,637 lifetime savings of moneys that would have drained personal and public coffers!

Powerful as this illustration is, it doesn't measure the savings in human misery, confusion, and pain by MHMC participants who now have greater success, happiness, and stability in their intimate relationships, parenting, and life goals.