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BUILDING FAMILY STRENGTHS: ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY LINKAGES TO SUPPORT FAMILIES

Cheryl L. Barber*, Barbara Rohrs, Nancy Stehulak and Marilyn Sachs

ABSTRACT:

Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agents in Northwest Ohio collaborated on an in-depth program for professionals working with families. The goals were to (1) share Extension resources supporting family life; (2) present Extension as a source of research-based information; and (3) promote networking among community agencies. Resources covered the topics of: parenting, aging, family life, marriage enrichment, and all relationships throughout the lifespan. The following format was used: Extension professionals shared resources, demonstrated how they used it with families, then allowed participants to discuss how they would use this information. Additional time was allotted to share with participants specific ways they could collaborate with Extension professionals to enhance programs for at-risk families. Participants were encouraged to use local Extension offices and the OSU Extension Data Center as an informational source for grant writing. Through interviews public sector employees working with at-risk families declared that prior to this workshop, they were unaware of the wealth of information available from Extension and how it could improve their services. An additional, unexpected and positive outcome was building relationships with local industries and employers who provide family services and resources to employees. Employers and employees all benefit when family problems are addressed and possible solutions are shared. Using this information as a springboard, Ohio State University Extension has continued to collaborate with area industries, employers and professionals who work with at-risk families. Continuing evaluation has shown this is an effective way to share Extension resources and expand our collaboration efforts within the community.

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IMPACT ON THREE GENERATIONS FROM GROWING UP ON A WYOMING HOMESTEAD

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ABSTRACT:

Situation: Homesteading in the western states played a significant role in the development of agricultural communities. The Heart Mountain homestead project near Powell, Wyoming in 1949 developed into a thriving community. There were key denominators that enhanced three generations of families within this community. Objective: The objective of this qualitative research project was to evaluate and document those components of family values, traditions, community spirit, and educational opportunities that contributed to the success of a thriving community that is extending to three generations. Methods: A qualitative research method was used in interviews with three generations of families. The interviews were taped and then transcribed. Old pictures, vital documents, maps, and books were acquired to furnish more extensive history. University of Wyoming faculty contributed to the research project in trainings before the interview process began. Results: Through evaluation of interviews and other documents and historical information, key components of resiliency and industry were determined that insured the success of this homestead community. The impact of the educational endeavors of UW Cooperative Extension was established. A vital part of western American history was preserved in archives for future research and investigation. Significance/Usefulness: There were significant factors that impacted community cohesiveness and family resiliency. By tracking the family traditions, values, work ethic, and community goals throughout three generations, similar factors were determined that affected the success of the Heart Mountain homestead community.

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PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR THE CHALLENGING TASK FACED BY GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

Diana Christensen*

ABSTRACT:

In the last decade there has been a dramatic increase in the number of grandchildren being raised by grandparents. Idaho ranks third in the US in this increase (80% increase), Utah and Nevada are ahead of Idaho at over 100% increase. In 1970 there were 2.2 million children in households headed by grandparents. In 1997 this figure had risen to 3.9 million. By 2002 there were over 6 million children in grandparent headed households. This represents 8% of all children. The causes are varied, including death of parents, incarceration of parents, teen pregnancy, family violence, HIV/AIDS, but most frequently the causes are substance abuse by the parents, or mental illness of parents. Issues faced by grandparents (or other kin) taking on the raising of grandchildren that go beyond the range of parenting challenges faced by all parents include emotional issues such as guilt, starting over, isolation from peers, criticism from extended family, conflict with own children, or grandchildren abused by their own parents or caregivers. Other stressful factors are learning new parenting styles, declining health, dealing with school regulations and medical care, and need for housing, financial, and legal assistance. Policies and practices nationally, in states and in local communities should encourage rather than discourage the responsible actions of those relatives who come forward to take care of the children of kin. The Idaho KinCare Coalition was organized in 2001 to promote social and legislative change through education and advocacy, and to provide the social supports needed by grandparents and other relatives raising the children in their care.

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UTAH'S MARRIAGE INITIATIVE: STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE IN UTAH

James P. Marshall Ph.D.*, David Schramm, M.S., Linda Skogrand, Ph.D. and Fay Belnap

ABSTRACT:

We propose to present a poster presenting the Utah Marriage Initiative, which is a five part project including new uses for technology sponsored by the Governor's Commission on Marriage, the Department of Workforce Services, and Utah State University Extension. The project includes (1) the Utah marriage Website; (2) the Utah marriage survey; (3) Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) training for Extension educators; (4) replication of the Oklahoma marriage study; (5) the creation of online courses to prepare for and strengthen marriage. The Website provides current research-based information to individuals and couples who desire information on maintaining and strengthening the bond of marriage. The marriage survey asked 2500 recently married couples in Utah to provide information about their preparation for and transition to marriage. The PREP training will be used to teach hundreds of couples throughout the state how to improve their relationships. Replicating the Oklahoma marriage study will help us understand more about marriage and divorce in Utah. The online courses will provide easy access to interactive, skill-based marriage education. This is an example of how Extension in the state of Utah is addressing the critical issue of preparing for and strengthening marriages in an effort to reduce divorce.

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A CHALLENGE FOR COMMUNITIES: MEETING THE NEEDS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Harriet Shaklee* and Diane Demarest

ABSTRACT:

Recent findings on early brain development have led to new concerns about child development for infants and preschoolers. Initial calls for action focused on children in the early years that were seen by many as critical for children's brain development. Studies show that investing in the early years improves outcomes for children and is cost-effective for communities. The mission of the Cooperative Extension System is to bring to world of research to the issues of public concern. With its strong ties to families and communities, Extension is uniquely positioned to help families, citizens and policy makers make sound decisions about how to best meet the needs of young children. To address this concern, we conducted a survey of 13 Idaho communities to assess the programs and services available to help parents of young children best meet their children's needs. Parents of young children and parent educators were asked about the resources available in their communities for young children. Results showed that programs for children from 0-3 and their parents were very rare. Opportunities for children from 4-5 and their parents were somewhat more common, but still limited in availability. While research shows the early years to be important years of development, our survey shows that communities have little support to offer parents and their young children. This evidence may point to a key role for Extension to work with their communities to better meet the needs of their youngest residents.

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