NATIONAL RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD CLEARINGHOUSE
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WEBINAR
Moderator: Nigel Vann
June 22, 2010
1:00 pm CT

Operator: Good day and welcome to the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse Technical Assistance webcast. Today's conference is being recorded.

At this time, I would like to turn the conference over to Nigel Van. Please go ahead.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much and hello everybody. Trust your summers are going well. I have just a few brief announcements before we get going. I know a few people have had problems downloading the slides for the day but we did send those out again.

Thank you, Jen McHenry, for that and so you should have gotten them. If you haven't, have another look in your inbox and there should also be a handout in the earlier e-mail from this morning and we will be referencing that in our final presentation today.

If you haven't noticed yet, the clearinghouse Website at fatherhood.gov has gotten a new look so I do encourage you to go and take a look at that. There may still be a few technical glitches on that so if you get a message that says that requested page could not be found, just click anywhere and then you'll be able to get on and go to the home page.

One feature on there that you might want to share with your dads and others in the community is a message asking you to join the President's Fathering and Mentoring Initiative.

The goal of this is to encourage individuals especially dads to be involved in the lives of their kids and also to be positive role models and mentors for other children in their lives and communities and there's a link there where your dads and anybody else can sign-up to show their commitment to their children and their community.

And I know we keep saying it but we are getting very close now to having an operational community of practice that will enable you to talk to each other, share ideas, successful strategies, new resources, etc. We've got just one technical glitch to work out on that and then you will be receiving a formal announcement about how to access that hopefully very soon.

Okay, onto today's webinar which is our fifth webinar dealing with evaluation so that's certain indication of the importance of evaluation of the work that you all do.

There were three of these provided in 2007 and then we had one last year with (Susan Passmore) or (James Bell Associates) and (Irene Lucky) at the South Carolina Centers for Fathers and Families who presented some tools and tips to help document and impact your work.

As we mentioned in the announcement for today's webinar, (Dr. Lucky) made the point that evaluation needs to be seen as an integral part of your program that can be helpful throughout the ten year reprogram and not just a product pressured at the end, specified with reporting - not just a product produced - at the end of your specified reporting period.

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And that same point was actually made in one of the 2007 webinars by (Alison Metz) and (Djisintibronti Tinkeuchoutrens) who said evaluation is not a one-time thing. It's an ongoing process that should benefit programs and participants so that's certainly why we're focusing on this today.

I realize that evaluation and research often seem like daunting terms but I think the general message is we need to treat evaluation as our friend and obviously one of the real challenges and weaknesses for the fatherhood field is the lack of definitive research demonstrating measurable long-term outcomes.

However, it's also important to recognize that scientifically-rigorous evaluation requires large-scale sample sizes and a comprehensive research design that's really beyond the scope of most individual programs so we have to look at ways in which you can use evaluation meaningfully in terms of your individual programs and there's at least a couple of ways you can do that.

On the one hand, you can be tracking current research so that you can shed light on promising and successful strategies and therefore design new and improved program approaches that do build on the field of work and also help you make the case to potential funders.

And we do have a lot of that literature on the clearinghouse Website and we'll continue to add to it so we certainly encourage you to keep checking that and also share any new information that you come across anywhere.

And we will be talking a little bit today about some of these current lessons learned but the main focus that we're taking which is something that on an individual program level you can do is to really track what you're doing and how you're having an impact in terms of your program goals.

So you can then look at that data and make adjustments to what you're doing to really ensure that you are on track to meet your goals and also making meaningful changes in the lives of our participants.

So we've got an interesting lineup to present this for you today to help address these questions. We have Steve Nordseth out in California and Ted Strader who's based in Kentucky but he's actually today at the African-American Healthy Marriage Initiative Conference in North Carolina. He's there with Matt Crews so our command central is actually coming from there today.

Steve and Ted will both be sharing tools and strategies that they've used with their staff to track their outcomes against their goals. Steve's working with homeless youth in San Jose, California and Ted's built on work that he's been doing for a long while around substance abuse and they provide healthy managed services for low-income ex-offenders in their spaces.

And then we also have Jennifer Miller-(Gobet) on the phone with us and she's working with the National Supporting Healthy Marriages Demonstration Project and is going to be sharing some lessons learned from that national project and also other research work done by NDRC.

And I think one of the interesting things from me about this whole work is that personally I've had the opportunity to meet a lot of fathers whose lives have definitely been touched by this work.

I think one of the challenges is how do we capture in order to really convince people that this work is having an impact. We can certainly refer to research that shows that children do better when they've got father positively involved so perhaps on one level it's enough to just be able to show that we're getting fathers more involved in positive ways and that's a thought that I'm going

to come back to in the end in the Q&A if we have time but I just want to sort of throw that out there now.

So I'm going to pass it over to Matt Crews just to remind you how you can ask a question and then we'll come back and I'll introduce our first presenter.

Matt Crews: Thank you, Nigel. Real quick if you put to your attention to the screen, I'm going to go over how to ask a question.

Any time during the duration of this webinar, you can ask a question. What you'll have to do is just submit it and for some reason we don't answer it during this webinar, just get in contact with the FPO and we'll make sure that happens.

Now here's how you ask one. Click on the word Q&A in the upper left-hand corner. Type your question in the box and then click the word ask or you can push enter and either way we'll receive it.

We won't be going over questions until the very end of the webinar so you can submit it like I said anytime during the webinar but we'll have the Q&A session at the very end.

Some other technical issues. If your screen is too small, you want the size to be bigger, hit F5 but if you want to ask a question, you cannot ask a question with the size all the way - taking up - the whole majority of the screen. Hit escape and bring it back to the original view.

If you have trouble hearing, you can send us a message with the Q&A tool and if you're interested in slides that you didn't get the ones that went out earlier for some reason, e-mail us at info@fatherhood.gov and we'll get them right to you.

Nigel Vann: Okay, thanks very much, Matt; so our first presenter is Steve Nordseth. Steve, are you up and running now? Have you got your screen active?

Steven Nordseth: My screen is not working currently so I think I'm going to go ahead and work from the slides I've got on my other computer here and Matt, if you can just notify me if I'm getting off-track in terms of slides so I'll just chug along as good as I can.

Nigel Vann: Okay, as long as you're comfortable doing that, great, okay.

Steven Nordseth: Yes, no problem.

Nigel Vann: So let me just introduce Steve real briefly for you all. He is the drop-in center program manager for the Bill Wilson Center in San Jose, California. As I mentioned, their main client base there is homeless youth so they've got a very interesting project to address fatherhood from that perspective and they've also done a really good job of promoting from within their client ranks.

I had the opportunity to provide a training session for several of the staff there last year and we was really impressed with the skills that all of Steve's staff bring to the job and I think certainly Steve deserves a lot of credit for that so they've also been doing, you know, it's interesting Steve indicated before we got started with this webinar that he'd like to go first because he felt he was perhaps the least experienced of the three presenters but as I think you'll see as he goes through his presentation that he's certainly a vast understatement.

He's put together a real interesting array of slides for you today that really offers some hands-on tools and observations on how you can take the information you gather and work with your staff

to really improve things for the client so Steve certainly deserves a lot of credit for all the work he's doing out there, so Steve, I hope this is going to work for you, just working from your slides and just let Matt know as you're ready to move forward.

Steven Nordseth: Yes, I think we'll be fine so thank you for that warm introduction. I'm going to go ahead and just jump right in because I know we are on a time crunch. I am Steve Nordseth. I'm from Bill Wilson Center here in San Jose, California.

As Nigel mentioned, we work with homeless and at-risk youth and we work with a specific population called the (Tay) population so our age range varies but in general it's from about 16 years old up until about 24.

So I have a lot of examples in my slides and I think you'll see that obviously they're going to be tailored to a very specific population but in general a lot of these kind of tools and ideas can be used across the board so by now I think we should be on slide entitled topics to be covered.

Just to give you a brief idea of what I'm going to go over so we can have kind of an agenda of what I'm going to cover, I wanted to talk about data from the very beginning in terms of when you first get a contract.

Now most of us are going to be far beyond these kind of beginning levels of where you're at when you get a contract but I wanted to cover it across the entire spectrum so that you get an idea of data collection and the use of data starts really with the beginning of your program before you even get the contract and you're applying for this program, you're thinking about how you're going to measure this stuff you say you're going to do and then how you're going to use that to improve the program.

So I'll start with framing the program in terms of what to do without a project abstract and a logic model. I'll move on to actual the collection of the data so how the data stream works, what types of tools you can use to collect data, and then I'll move on to once collected, how is that data interpreted?

So here at the drop-in center we have a couple of different ways of interpreting data whether it be through metrics, dashboards or spreadsheets and I've got some examples of those different interpretation techniques here in the next few slides.

And then finally we're going to talk about putting the data to good use so I'll give a couple of examples of how I used data to improve my program and to expand the outreach of our contract and the way it's used to help young fathers here in San Jose, California so next slide please, Matt.

Framing your program so what we did is we created a project abstract to begin this whole process of what change we were trying to create and how we were going to measure that.

So once the abstract was created, we used that abstract then to create the actual logic model so the logic model was really the roadmap for us. That's the map that tells us where we're going, who's going to do what, and how it's going to get done and not only that, how is it going to get measured?

So I'm going to go on to show you a couple examples of how those work but one point I did want to make before I moved on is that it's important to have your entire agency involved in the creation not only of the abstract and the logic model but the use of the data going forward.

This is a five-year contract that we're under and a program like ours, my program specifically is one of nearly different programs inside our agency so it'd be very easy for a contract to get lost in all that data floating around out there.

We use an internal database here at Bill Wilson Center that has hundreds of thousands of different parts of data flowing through it at any one point so it really behooves you to get not only your administrators on board but your board involved in what it is you're doing, what changes you're attempting to make, how you're going to measure data and then report back in terms of how you're doing so the project abstract really helps in terms of focusing in and narrowing in where you're going to go. Next slide.

This is just an example of some of the items that we include in a project abstract so obviously you've got your overall goal and for this particular grant you can see the overall goal there at the top. But then not just the goal but what's important is what kind of objectives you're aiming to come out with so that's the desired outcome, the change that you want to see so to speak.

Then you've got the activities that need to take place in order hopefully to gain that outcome and then you've got who is going to be coordinating these different parts of the program so the responsible persons.

The completion date would be either the end of the contract period or the end of the fiscal year or whichever way you're measuring it and then things that I like to include in the abstract are different ways of explaining how you're going to get people in, how you're going to evaluate, how you're going to figure out if what you're doing is successful and so forth and so on so if we can go to the next slide, you should have before you a sample of a project abstract.

So what we've got here if you can see is the actual goal statement up at the top. Some of the objectives are listed in the far left column and then as you go from left to right, you see these different components of the abstract working themselves out so what are the activities, who is responsible, when does it need to be completed, what activities are going to facilitate it being completed, and then finally what we're talking about today, the different evaluation methods for any specific outcome. Next slide, please.

So once you've got your abstract dialed in, you're going to move on to creating a logic model so like I mentioned, a logic model for me, the way I think is really a roadmap of who's doing what, where are we trying to go and what are we trying to do so you've got inputs which would be the far left and actually if we can just move on to the next slide, I'll show you the sample while we go through it.

The far left would be inputs so what as an agency as a population is going into this program so we've got staff, we've got youth, a very specific population and those are all going in and we're trying to create these interventions which is the next segment so these interventions you can read them as we go down the list, these are the actual items or services that are going to be taking place.

And then the outputs the way our contract is broken down, we've got it split into several different phases so as you move through the program, they may go through all three phases, they may go through one phase and depending on where they go, there's going to be different tools to measure what it is - what change it is - we're trying to measure.

And then really the most important segment for me is the short-term objectives. These are the actual objectives that we're attempting to measure. These are things that we're building tools to measure and this is data that we're collecting and that's going back into the program.

And what I mean by that is this is the data that we're using to actually update the program, make it more successful, make youth enjoy their time here more and as Nigel has mentioned, a lot of this data is influenced by the young people that we serve as well really building the youth that we serve into our program is a major way of program improvement because who better to tell us what we're doing right or what we're doing wrong than the young people that we're serving.

So while it's not listed specifically here on the short-term objectives, it really is a major part of the component and then the far right column you've got the long-term objectives.

These are things that we're not necessarily going to be able to measure because the scope is much greater and it would be almost impossible to control for some of the variables that would affect these long-term objectives.

But this just gives us an idea of where do we want our youth to end-up down the road so this is really not something that's going to be measured but is important there for people to get a sense of why is this important, what are we trying to do? Next slide, please.

So here we should be talking about data collection so in order to collect data obviously you're going to have to develop the tools to do so. There are a lot of prepackaged data collection tools but as I'm sure most of you are aware, if you have a specific population, you really need a specific tool.

So what we did is we designed our data collection tools here in-house so we took all the information that we're trying to measure from our logic model and then place that into tools that we could use in order to measure that so our most important tool I think that we use are the pre-post test surveys.

Those are surveys that are designed to take a snapshot of where somebody is when they come in, where somebody may be in the middle of services and where somebody is upon exit and those are extremely useful because they can really point us in the right direction of where are the changes being made because as you know, looking at the project model or the logic model, we're trying to gauge change in very different aspects.

So it's important to have a pre-post test that can cover as many of those different components of the program as possible. We also use assessments so those would be one time, used up-front to kind of get an idea of where a client is.

We use case notes as well and we also use our actual logic model to determine what we're going to be measuring so we compare our case notes with our logic model to see is this person moving in the direction that we want?

Are they moving towards those short-term objectives? Are they moving towards those long-term objectives perhaps so case notes while they're very lengthy and they're more verbal and they take a lot of interpretation and it's a lot more time-consuming than just collecting numbers and inputting them to a database, they are useful in terms of collecting data and making improvements to a program.

One thing I do want to mention is how important the training of the staff are in the actual collection of data because if you don't have staff who are invested and who understand the importance of this data, you're really going to get skewed results.

You're going to get for an example from my program at the very beginning we would pass out a survey or a pre-post test and on the left-hand column, you know, this is - an example would be - okay, we've got how did you rate this service? Great, not so great, I hated it. We get clients that would go right down the line of great, great, great, great, great, great, great.

That might make us feel good as a program but it really is not useful in terms of program improvement because what you've got is either clients or staff who are not invested in what this process really means to they just go bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, we think you want to hear you're great so here you go and that really doesn't help us.

So what we had to do was train staff that this really is important, this makes the program better and we also have to train the clients so before we handout a pre-test or post-test, we say hey look, we want you to be honest.

We want you to give us honest feedback. We care about what you think about this program and your comments and suggestions make a difference so it really has to do with training staff as well as training the young people that we're serving in our program.

And finally in terms of data collection, what's extremely important to me is having a database that can really produce results so as I mentioned earlier we have an internal database that we use but there's also lots of packaged database programs that can be used in terms of tracking data and attaching that to results.

So for us, the main thing I can do that I really appreciate is that I can input data into this database and then I can pull reports so I don't have to individually hand-count how many people did this, how many people went to group?

I can actually just login to our database, I can put in a time range, and they can tell me exactly where we're at and that saves too much time and energy in terms of data collection and the use of data. Next slide, please, so what I wanted to do is just create a real general kind of arrow diagram of the process of collecting the data so the data for us really begins at intake.

Several times we might catch a person on outreach which is being out in the community and it might start there but for the most part it starts at intake so a client comes in, we do the intake paperwork which includes the assessments. It includes demographic information and then we continue down the line to services provided.

So then we begin to track what service is this person receiving? Are they making an impact and then we've got the daily session log which is basically what types of services clients are receiving on a daily basis.

And as we continue around this circle, we start to actually engage with clients in terms of pulling data from them so we've got pre-post test next and then with that information, we can input that into the database and that in turn can become a spreadsheet which we use to create our metrics and our dashboards and our metrics and dashboards which I'll cover in just a few moments here is what we present to our administrators and our board of directors to say this is what we're doing, this is how successful we're being, this is where we need areas of improvement and so forth and so on. Next slide, please.

So I just wanted to give a couple of brief examples of tools that we've created and like I mentioned, I don't really think there's a right or wrong way to create tools. It really has to do with what it is you're trying to measure and in terms of wording it in a way that your population can understand.

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A lot of prepackaged kits so to speak like for instance (K.D. Live Skills) is one that we've used in the past. They may be excellent measuring tools but our youth might not want to sit down and go through a 20-page assessment, something like that so for us specifically we really created tools that tailored to our kids.

They've got a short attention span. They want to be in and out. That assessment - that pre-post test - better be one page, maybe front and back if you're lucky but it really has to be a tool that fits the population.

And for us, we like to include a range of responses for young people so that they can really think about it's not just a yes or no questions, did I benefit from this? If I really benefited, I benefited a little bit. I really don't know.

Maybe I didn't benefit at all. Maybe I'm worse off before I came here god forbid but what we've got is an example of one of the questions here on the right-hand side in the blue box about job skills.

That's one of the components of our program is employment. That's a major focus of our program so what we've got is just sample questions that would be on a pre-post test and if we can go to the next slide, please, Matt.

You've got actual - this is an actual - segment of one of our surveys where you see the questions on the left-hand side and then you see the range of responses and the youth can circle their responses.

Now one difficulty we do run into is that these really need to be explained appropriately to the youth beforehand so for instances we've got kids who might see a five and think five is the best and they'll circle five but really if you read up at the top, it says strongly disagree.

So these surveys can be tricky and they can give you skewed data if they're not properly explained to the staff and properly explained to the clients that are going to be going through them. Next slide.

One more sample survey question so this would be about our financial readiness workshop. This is another glimpse of one of the surveys that we use to measure change in terms of folks that have gone through our financial readiness program so they can look at these questions and then again they can rate themselves on a different scale.

And while I'm talking about complications, another area of interpretation that becomes difficult is when you're looking at a pre-post test survey, you might have a young person coming in at day one. You'll give them a survey. Might ask questions about how comfortable are you with this, how much do you know about this?

And dealing with young people again, they think they know it all so okay, you know, yes. I know all this. I'm pretty much a number 1 all the way down. I strongly agree that I know all this and then as we go through the workshop, they realize hey, there are some things that I didn't know.

So when you get to a post-test survey, instead of increasing in terms of their knowledge, it appears that they're decreasing because there are two - maybe there are three - and what you really have is not that your workshop or whatever you're presenting was not effective.

In a sense, it was effective, so effective that it showed them what they didn't know so basically they didn't know what they didn't know and if interpreted just on the basis of the scores, it would look as if you were doing a terrible job and people were going down.

But when you take into context that people didn't know what they didn't know, you can really take a look at data in terms of giving you a really good idea about where you need to hone in on and also refining your pre-post test surveys. Next tool, please.

We've got another just a quick example of a self-sufficiency matrix. This is another tool that we would use particularly for clients who are in case management so what this tool is it measures several different domains, not all of which are attached to this specific grant but you can see a client's progress in terms of a more holistic approach, where they're progressing, in different areas, their different life domains.

And this is important to measure not just what they're doing in terms of what you're working on in a grant but where are they going in terms of the overall context of life because we are working with homeless youth.

These are kids who are working on the streets so this type of information is important in addition to the data we're getting for the specific grant. Next slide, please.

So now we're getting to the real good stuff is interpreting the data so what I've got is just a basic diagram of where our data goes. Once we collect the data, it goes into the database and turns into a spreadsheet.

These are the raw numbers that we're collecting from pre-post tests, from basic demo stuff, from basic goals that we're tracking through our daily session logs and then they can go kind of either two directions, well, actually three directions.

It can either remain in the database and be pulled out only when I need to do a report or so forth or it can go a metric basically which is putting data into easy-to-use graphs and what we use those for is number 1 to track where are we at on our goals.

This is primarily for goals for us so I can show my boss or I can show our board this is where we're at, this is where we're going or it can be used as a dashboard so what the dashboards are used for us is to measure where we're at on our measurable objectives so it's just another different type of tool where it's color-coded.

I'm a very visual person so I can see either red, yellow or green and when we get there I'll explain a little bit more about that. Next slide, please. This is just a quick example of a metric that we use to track the different goals.

We've got several different goals for this contract but from my program alone, we've got somewhere in the neighborhood of 40 different contract goals for different contracts and I can easily look at this and see where we're at.

It tells me a lot. It tells me where I'm at in the program. For instance, you can see the two left bars are very, very high. The second bar is somewhat low so that tells me what's going on here. I can take a look. We're still over goal but why is it so much lower and the answer is because in this particular example, not all the 3rd Quarter data has been entered yet. Next slide, please.

This is an example of one of the dashboards that we'll use so what we've got here is a sample from a board report so what you have on the left-hand side is the actual measurable objectives

from this particular project, our fatherhood works program and you've got a guide that tells you where you're at.

Red means you need to take action, you're significantly below your goal. Yellow means that you're just below and that there's something going on. You need to figure out what's happening and green would be satisfactory so we've got the goals listed next and in the far right-hand column is the one I look at to tell me where I'm at.

It's got the percentage but more importantly for me it's got the color so I know the top two and the bottom one are not an issue. We're at where we need to be at. The two in the center there that are yellow. I need to figure out what's going on and the answers to that is that data has not been measured yet so it remains yellow until it's inputted.

And finally putting data to good use. This is really the meat and potatoes of the entire data collection process. It's getting data and figuring out what are you going to do with this data so for us, we use data to improve the program, we use data to demonstrate that the program is successful. We use data in terms of tracking the effectiveness of our interventions and I've got just a quick example of how we use data to improve programs.

As mentioned earlier, the use of client feedback is really critical to our program and we really view our program as the youths program so what we do is not only by using them as individuals to give feedback through opportunities that they have but we also use our data to figure out what's happening and what's going on with the program so if we can go to the next slide, please.

What we've got here is just a real brief example and I'm right at my time so I'm going to take just about 30 seconds to explain this but in the very beginning, I think some of you will identify with the challenge of recruitment and retention so recruitment and retention I think for many other grantees as it was for us was an issue particularly for our clients.

They're transient, we were trying to use this 10-week-in-a-row curriculum and we were having a lot of challenges in terms of getting youth to be invested for that ten weeks so prior to our changes, only about a third of our clients identified as father figures and prior to the changes that we made from data collection, less than 40% of our clients participating in the course were able to graduate or to attend the full ten weeks so obviously this was unacceptable.

We found this out through monitoring just hard data through spreadsheets and we were able to see that we weren't - and the pre-post tests for the previous one identifying as a father figure - so we were able to look at this and say well, what mistakes are we making because it's really a programmatic mistake.

So what we found is that young people were not considering themselves father figures if they did not have a biological child in the home so what we did is we really explained to them what a father figure is in terms of what we consider it is, you know, somebody that has a child in their life, somebody that's a non-custodial parent, somebody that has even an adolescent family member, a young family member, brother or sister, and there's no father in the home.

So we really took the time during our workshops to explain what is a father figure prior to doing a pre-post test and then after that pre-post test, the results just skyrocketed in terms of how many of our young folks considered themselves father figures.

We also targeted our outreach, made it more specific? I think in the beginning of a program, there's this desire to overproduce and we've got to get this done. We want to really succeed and excel so we did outreach to everybody and then we get kids in who are not fathers.

If you're not a father, you're not going to be invested in the material that we're talking about and we had a failure rate that was pretty high so what we did is we targeted our outreach, we condensed our class size so that it was a more intimate experience for young people and we even went so far as to control our environment.

So instead of doing the workshops here, we went to where the fathers were so we worked with another federal program, Job Corps. We took our show on the road to them. The youth, they cannot leave that program so they're guaranteed to be there when you get there.

We had 100% graduation rates there and we also created a fatherhood retreat where we grabbed 10-12 young fathers, we took them out of town, we took the entire 32-hour curriculum, condensed that down into three days so that they're still getting the exact same curriculum, the exact same amount of hours in terms of instruction and we condensed that into three days.

They cannot escape unless they jump in this lake and swim away and they were able to get the full program and the full graduation rate 100% so really coming up with different techniques based on data to improve the program was really, really critical in terms of how we were able to bolster our success with fathers and hopefully make some more significant impacts with the young people we're working with, and that's about it for me.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Steve. Excellent presentation, particularly given the technical difficulties you had at the beginning there.

Steven Nordseth: Right, thank you.

Nigel Vann: So a couple points that I think Steve made that I'd really like to emphasize that we can perhaps talk about a bit more as we go along, he really talked quite a bit there about it being a team effort, not just the staff but also the participants being involved and invested in taking a look at what's going on in the program and how do we make it better.

And he also raised the point about at the beginning of the program, your participants don't know what they don't know so we do run into that issue that Steve brought up that sometimes on the post tests, it may appear that scores have gone down so that's actually an issue that Ted's going to address a little bit towards the end of his presentation so I won't say any more on that.

So let me move forward and introduce our next presenter, Ted Strader, who is the founder and Executive Directors of COPES which stands for the Council on Prevention and Education, Substances based in Louisville, Kentucky. Ted's also the lead author and program developer for all their programs.

They're received several distinctive honors and awards including exemplary program awards from three separate agencies. His curriculum "creating lasting family connections" is listed on the National Registry of Effective Prevention Programs and has also been recognized as a national model.

Ted's published numerous books and curricula and articles. He's presented at many local, state and national conferences and serves as a consultant on personal and family life skills, violence prevention and alcohol and drug prevention in many cities over the past 25 years.

And just this morning he gave a presentation at the African-American Healthy Marriage Conference having just returned from a week's vacation where he was totally cut-off from the

world so we welcome you back to the world Ted and we really appreciate you being able to jump in and do this straightaway.

Ted Strader: Nigel, I'm happy to. It's good to be wired back in to civilization so thank you for the opportunity to share some information about evaluation and building on program successes.

I'm cutting at this a little bit different than Steve. I was very pleased with your presentation Steve. I thought it was insightful and very helpful. I want to come at it almost more simplistically just to make a few basic points especially for those that are new to program evaluation who come at from the passion of wanting to work with fathers and families as many of us program directors do and especially we're funded like many of us are with OFA where there's not a huge budget for program evaluation.

So I'm going to speak on many of the same topics just in a little bit different way. I want to summarize some of Steve's comments that match for all of us that have ever gotten success in evaluating programs so my first slide is the busiest and there it is and this is again sort of a summary of what Steve had to say.

The first thing to recognize is that the program director, the management team including the evaluator must know their goals and objectives and must be able to translate them into behavioral terms and that typically means for the client.

How do you want the behaviors of your clients to change? For example, you want to reduce fighting in a marriage. You want to reduce physical conflict. You want to reduce name-calling. You want to increase time spent with children. You want to increase recreational opportunities.

Those are sort of behavioral terms instead of saying we want to improve the quality of life. Well, what's that, so naming your goals and objectives and reducing them to behavioral terms is one of the first things to do and it's helpful to involve obviously the management team and a person who understands evaluation.

Secondly, and most program directors are good at this part, they know what strategies, curriculum or services or conditions that they think they can change that will help cause their clients to have the kind of growth that they want.

So this is usually a program director's strength but it's playing to the strength of the program into the strength of the evaluation. We're trying to get a dual effort here, not just provide good services but let's measure what services we're providing so we can demonstrate how good they are.

So then we select and train staff to conduct the approach, the curriculum, the training, the skills, the mentoring, the case management or whatever service delivery the program staff are used to. We train staff to do that but at the same time, the next step is bringing the management team, the staff and the evaluators together then once everybody understands what they're trying to do and with whom they're trying to do it, the client population.

Then it's important to sit down and design a team approach, program staff and evaluators to conduct the program evaluation together. Neither one can do it alone. Evaluators are absolutely of no value when there is no program being done. Let me say that differently.

You can't evaluate something not happening, so let's - it's being able to explain - what we're going to do with the - what are staff - are going to do that's going to help clients to engage in some kind of change and designing that together so together they create or select the right instruments.

Steve was mentioning there's lots of them out there but typically it's best to find something that matches exactly what you're doing so creating your own as Steve found out at the Wilson Center and that others have found out, creating your own gives you the best chance of success because you know better than anyone else what you're trying to accomplish with your clients or with your service recipients.

So when you create those instruments, that usually takes an evaluator to team up with you and getting them to understand and adhere to the changes that you think you can help the clients make and then putting those participant changes - typically those are changes - in knowledge, changes in attitude, changes in skills, and are ultimately you want them to combine up to changing behaviors.

In social science research, it's important to show behavioral changes. Back in the - gosh, I guess I'm an old guy, I'm 56 years old, I was doing family strengthening and substance abuse programming back in the last '70s and early '80s - and we found out early on we can change knowledge.

We can change knowledge on alcohol and drugs. We can change knowledge on family skills but changing behaviors was a huge problem. We often ran programs that had the opposite impact on behavior than we wanted.

For example, we used to do interventions - I'm going to pick a drug example because most of us are not doing drug programming here but it comes from my past so I won't hook anybody's defenses - we used to do drug prevention by saying here's what it looks like, here's what it smells like, here's what it tastes like, don't do it.

But if you show people what it looks like, smells like, tastes like well, they get curious and they want to try it so experimentation went up when we increased knowledge and information.

Well, that's the exact opposite behavior that we wanted so sometimes un-insightfully we create problems rather than solutions in our programming so good evaluations help us fix that problem quickly.

So learning to look to build not just the knowledge, not just the attitude and the skills but to also be measuring the behaviors and that's something that OFA is very interested in learning in the fatherhood field and the healthy marriage field and the relationship-strengthening department.

What are the behaviors that we can change so that we can show results so together the evaluators and the program managers and the program staff together agree on who, what, when, where and how of survey administration or data collection, who will compile and analyze the results, and who will get what information when and how they will get it and Steve did a great job of talking about many of the hows and the ways to share the information.

Finally when program staff, management and the evaluators look at the results together, they can start to adapt the program or the project based on the information that they've gathered so that's just my first picture is just to say this.

For program directors that have been successful, they know they have to do all of these things in order to get meaningful behavioral results but learning to do any of those steps is the beginning of the success. Having good intentions just isn't enough in our business of changing human behaviors.

So my next slide, I just created a sort of a ladder so what is evaluation? Well really, it's many things. On one hand you want to look at processes that are going on. Are my staff and I, is our team, our volunteers, do we do the things that we say we're going to do?

Did we cover the curriculum if we had one? Did we provide case management as we said we were going to? Did anybody come when we provided the service? Did anyone show up? How many hours were they there? Did they feel cared about? What was the attendance rate?

Those are processes that we can measure and track and again Steve gave excellent examples of that. I just want to go up the ladder. Now that's nice and that's helpful and it's essential and it's the beginning stage of evaluations.

The next is well, what knowledge and attitudes are we impacting in our target population then as we go up, that's nice to know that you've changed knowledge and attitudes but then the next thing is well, have we changed any skills?

Have they changed knowledge about their behavior? Skills often imply a behavior but learning a skill doesn't mean you're going to use it later in real life so then as you go up the ladder, the next stage is behavioral change.

Okay, I know the information. I have the skills and I'm choosing to do it and you're tracking that I have changed that behavior in my life. That is the kind of outcome that I think the OFA, that major funders, foundations, they want to see behavioral change over time and it's difficult to do.

So these are listed in the ascending order of meaning and value so I'm going to just take a moment to talk about each one a little bit more just to be sure I'm clear and we'll go to our next slide.

So in a process evaluation, the real question is did we do what we said we were going to do? Now most program directors are doing this intuitively and intrinsically anyway but do we have ways to capture this and present that information to ourselves, to our staff, to each other, to our boards and to our funding sources.

So the kinds of questions you're asking in the process evaluation are did we cover the material? How do the participants feel about that? Did they feel cared about? What were the attendance rates? Did we do section A part B? Did we do part C? Did we do the follow-up phone calls like we said in our plan?

Steve had talked about creating that abstract or that picture that lists all the activities and the intended outcomes. Well, these are the things that staff do to get the clients there. Are we doing them and are they perceived well?

So then going to the next slide, we'll talk about some knowledge and attitude things so I gave just some examples of some knowledge outcomes and I just gave samples of what a knowledge item might be.

Did we increase the participant's knowledge, sample knowledge item? To increase their knowledge, attitude or perception from pre-test to post-test, did children prosper with unconditional love and appropriate attention from both fathers and mothers?

That's a mouthful and in order to change that, that may be a question but I might need to change three things to get the kind of answer that I want to that question. What is unconditional love? Well, that's a neat question.

I can tell you want it isn't easier than I can tell you what it is and how do I get participants to understand when we mean when we say it and then to believe in their heart that it matters to their children and to create an intent that they will then want to do that with their children so that's a knowledge item.

That doesn't mean that they're going to do it. Just because they know that's the right answer doesn't mean they're going to change that behavior in their life but I know I've built a bridge toward that end.

So another knowledge item might be to increase the participant's knowledge, attitude, and perception that parental relationship stability really matters to their children.

That's just a sense, an idea, a belief in their heart well, if people believe that, that's a building block toward getting them to work hard for relationship stability versus some other things that people do in relationships.

So those are sample knowledge outcomes and those are nice to get but in terms of real meaning and substance to funders, they're not as impressed with that as they might be with behavioral outcomes so let's go to some attitude outcomes next.

Again, knowledge items and attitudes, they blend together so these are similar but the attitude that they want to spend more time together as a couple and with their children as a couple, that means mom and dad together with their children.

Here at the African-American Healthy Marriage Conference we were talking about how important that is and we hear that all the time but do our participants get that from our programming and do they change the amount of time they spend?

We're going to ask that question later but do they even know that it matters? The next one is to giving their children clear expectations and follow-through with plan consequences. Do people have the belief that that matters, much less do they do it?

So changing knowledge, changing attitudes are helpful and important. Then next we go to changing skills. Well, if that's kind of what we want to do, let's talk about some skills.

A skill that is very common in many family curriculums, many family strengthening curriculums, many communication curriculums to the pretty common skills so I just grab this one off the shelf.

The use of I messages. When you call me names, I feel scared and hurt for example is an I message. To increase the number of parents who report the ability to use that.

Now they're saying I know what it is and I know how to do it and that's an important thing to know because you can't expect people to do it if they don't know what it is and don't know how to do it so some of the preliminary work is building definitions and understandings and then it's getting people to engage in practice in behaviors.

So skill outcomes, to increase the number of parents who report the ability to use conflict resolution skills and/or who demonstrate the use of conflict resolution skills in role plays during the curriculum itself so there's multiple ways to measure skills.

So knowledge, attitudes and skills are nice but the real home run, the real intent of most programs is to change behaviors and that's where you're able to either see, capture, film or get reports of people saying that they're using skills that they've learned.

They know the skill. They know it. They know how to do it. They know when to do it and they can start reporting yes, in my real life at home, I've begun to do these things.

So I took the skills and then we're just looking at outcomes from surveys or from an observation points in time, have they increased the number of program parents and children who report using them in real life for any one of the three examples to increase the number of parents or children who report the actual use of positive discipline or expectation and consequence of skills from the time they start into a program until the time they end it.

And to increase the number of parent show report the actual use of effective conflict resolution skills in their relationships and who can give examples of that in their post-test period or at the end of the program.

Those are the kind of outcomes that funding sources like OFA, like the foundations that we have contracts with, most of the other federal agencies want to now see behavioral outcomes more than process outcomes, more than knowledge items, more than attitude items because changing behaviors is what's changing lives for the better.

Now one of the points that I said that Nigel mentioned that I like to talk about especially with our current audience today is for those who have maybe they're in the fourth year of a five-year contract.

They've not got the sophisticated level of evaluation that Steve was talking about. They might not have 30 years' experience like I do in developing programming and Nigel mentioned it's sometimes important to be able to look at some kind of outcomes even when you have not yet developed that kind of sophistication.

So I threw that slide in because I thought it would be helpful for some of our current grantees who maybe have focused on providing services to fathers and to families, married couples and so on.

You can really start - you can in fact - look at behavioral change. You can in fact look at knowledge, attitudes and skills with retrospective surveys which means maybe you didn't even do a pre-test.

Maybe you didn't create a sophisticated design but maybe at the end of your program, you can start at least doing some exit surveys that says okay, the theory is Steve mentioned sometimes people don't know what they don't know so sophisticated surveys, some can capture some of that data, some cannot.

But a retrospective survey can really gather that data efficiently and effectively and it's a great way to start learning how to do somewhat meaningful evaluations.

Now you won't publish any articles using retrospective surveys but most of us just want to publish a final report to our boards, to our funding sources and this can be helpful even if you just do it with your last whole year's service recipients.

Because at the end of your fourth year, you ought to be ready for your fifth year to be at the highest level of capability to provide services, should be at your - have the clearest - understanding of what you can and cannot accomplish, should have a pretty clear understanding

of who's there and who's not and certainly in the last year for a whole year, you can measure the meaningful changes that you think you're trying to get with retrospective surveys and to do them well requires kind of a two-part question.

A retrospective survey is administered only after the program intervention has been delivered if there's no pre-test. It simply asks two similar time-based questions about program knowledge, attitude, skills and of course behavior.

And then finally they can be integrated into up and running projects that have not yet developed more comprehensive evaluation practices so Nigel I promised that I'd talk about this briefly so I brought an example so we can go to the next slide, Matt.

Here's just an example of this is actually one question where we're measuring and we write, the question says clearly before I participated in the program, I was able to manage my children well.

Now remember we're asking that question after they've had your entire program so they're thinking back to before I had your program, how did I rate myself in this skill and it's a five-point scale, strongly agree all the way down to strongly disagree so there's a range here.

And then the next question which is paired with this says now after the program, I am able to manage my children well. Well, very often now they can measure themselves against themselves at an earlier point in time. That's what retrospective means.

They're going back in time looking at themselves and they're telling you with the information they now have, the knowledge and skill that they've gained from you, and you can talk about knowledge and skills and you can talk about behaviors and retrospective surveys so as long as you know what it is you're trying to accomplish, you can at least begin the process of asking these kinds of questions.

And as we move forward, we can get more and more sophisticated as Steve pointed out, there are lots of good tools on the market and there are tools that you can develop quickly that are really good with consultation from an effective evaluator.

So it's the tandem work between evaluation and programs. That's the way to go to find out if what you're doing has meaning and substance and value and that's probably the strongest way to contribute to the field but getting from the passion of a program provider who often is motivated out of care and concern for client populations, they see pain and dissolution on the ground and they want to get up and running from the passion of the pain but it's important to develop the professionalism over time.

And certainly by the time, we're running our second or third project in our careers, it's essential to start with evaluation as part of the first program practice upon contract or upon funding. Even in the development of a response to an RFP, it's helpful to have that vision in mind from the very start and great evaluations evolve. They don't start perfectly.

They start with a great plan and a great sense of where we might go but they capture the information that they need to make the kind of changes that Steve showed you in his slides, the skillful use of the information in changing the approach that the example he gave was perfect with the youth and changing definitions.

Well, you're a father figure. If you have younger siblings in the family, you can be seen as a responsible role model and then designing the program. Well, we're going to capture you over the course of a three-day weekend because you're here and we're going to go on this enjoyable trip

together than involves some recreation but this plan program activity and then we're going to see if it changes your knowledge, your attitude, your skills and most importantly your behaviors.

So the rubber meets the road at behavioral change. Here's just some strategies, some way to think about it but learning to get over the fear and angst of evaluators finding us insufficient, finding us inadequate is probably the biggest barrier for most program directors.

We're afraid that nobody else knows what we're trying to do, that they won't be able to capture it well, that we're going to be looked at as unsuccessful and it's the farthest thing from the truth.

A good evaluator on your team will help you find the ways to show the results that you deserve to show and to get the kind of recognition that your passion deserves so just throw those ideas out into the mix and I look forward to the questions and answers with others.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Ted. Wonderful presentation as well. You certainly made some great points there and offered some real practical stuff. I particularly liked the emphasis on behavioral outcomes.

That's something I've been stressing, you know, I've been doing some staff training sessions on group facilitation skills with a number of you around the country and trying to stress in that that when we're working with the dads in groups that we have to continually push them where we're trying to expand their knowledge and get them to think about things a bit differently and give them some skills but we have to continually challenge them to use those skills in the outside world, in the real world.

And then we need to be able to track how do we change that behavior so I think that's exactly what is the real key to having successful work and Ted says to treat the evaluator as our friend who's going to help us figure out how to succeed.

I would like to encourage folk to ask questions. I don't think we've had any questions come in yet but there's a wealth of information and experience we've got with Ted and Steve here just from what they've been doing in their grants.

But let's now move to Jennifer. Jennifer Miller-(Gobet), I hope I'm pronouncing that right Jennifer is working in MDRC's Families and Children Policy Division.

She's leaving the implementation research study for the supporting healthy marriage demonstration project which if you don't know about that, Jennifer's going to tell you more about it.

She's also been involved in various other MDRC projects where she's developed her expertise in site selection and development, program operations and management.

She began her career as a case manager serving homeless individuals so there's a link there to Steve's work and other families in the Oakland, California area.

She's got a master's in public policy from the University of California-Berkeley and she's actually in the middle of relocating with her husband and daughter overseas so we certainly appreciate her being able to take the time to join us today while she's in the middle of doing that.

You know, for those of you who don't know about MDRC, it used to start and correct me if I'm wrong Jennifer, it used to stand for Manpower Development Research Corporation but now it just goes by the acronym but they have a wealth of experience in large-scale social science research,

did a lot of work in the fatherhood field, took me back in the '90s with the (Penstress- Shammer) demonstration and have really used that research to build good program models moving forward.

And so that's one of the things that Jennifer is going to share today, how they built on that work and what they've been doing and what they recommend moving forward, and let me say also Jennifer had a few problems with her phone when we were in the pre-conference so if there some background noise, please just bear with us on that. Jennifer?

Jennifer Miller: Great, thanks, Nigel and good afternoon, everyone. I'm very glad to be here with you today. I always look forward to opportunities to put the heads of folks who are thinking about fatherhood and the heads of folks who are thinking about marriage together in the same room.

I think it's a great opportunity so I'm glad to be here. I'm going to be talking today about management strategies that we're using in the supporting healthy marriage project and if it's okay with everyone, I'll refer to it as SHM to save a little time. I know that adds another acronym to everyone's long list of acronyms.

We'll go the next slide, just a little bit about what SHM is. This is a study that's being funded by the Administration for Children and Families. There are eight sites across the country and we're using a random assignment design evaluation to touch a program that's aimed at supporting relationship stability and quality among low-income married couples.

And then in turn we're seeking to improve outcomes for their children and listed the sites in the appendix of our PowerPoint presentation and I also included a few sites in there that give more information about the evaluation that I didn't want to go into too much detail with but I'm happy to take questions about that if you have them.

MDRC is leading the study along with several partners and this team also plays a fairly substantial technical assistance role working with sites to make sure that the model is implemented and managed as intended.

So I just wanted to point out before I get too far into it that I'm not talking as Steve and Ted are from the perspective of a program manager but as someone who has sat on the technical assistance team and is also chronicling how the intervention has unfolded insights on the implementation research side.

So the sites are now in their final year of operation just to put it in present-day context for you. Services are slated to end on December 31st of this year and the management practices that I'll touch on today will be presented in the forthcoming report covering SHM's five pilot end first year.

So go to slide 3, please. I wanted to walk quickly through SHM's theory of change. This touches on slides 3 and 4 as well as a PDF handout, a diagram of the theory of change that should have come around to you as well.

I think it's an important place to start because I thought this would cover both why we're doing this work in the first place and to give you a sense of the model is that we're using both at the same time.

And then it also forms as both Steve and Ted said, a really important basis for all of the management strategies that we've put in place later on down the road so I'm just going to map this out here a little bit here.

So as you see in the diagram, the theory of change for SHM lays out goals at three stages in the life of the program and also in the life of participants and the overarching one is encouraging behavior change among participants.

The goals that we've mapped out are based on studies that show links between the quality of couple relationships and outcomes for kids and in that process, the team really set about understanding the mechanisms or the way in which parents' interactions affect children and then figuring out how to build skills for parents that lead to protective behaviors.

So the way SHM as a program seeks to bring about this change is by getting people to participate in a program that has three components. The core service is workshops. These last up to 15 weeks and it's between 24 and 30 hours of curriculum and they're based on curricula that have been tested and in some cases experimentally.

The focus on teaching skills in communication, conflict resolution, things like parenting as a team that can reduce conflict in the couple and promote stability in the home.

We know from prior studies of similar efforts that it can generate positive effects but typically those positive effects diminish over time so I think our model seeks to extend services over a 12-month period.

So this is an awfully long time to engage people in services and a big challenge in SHM has been keeping people around after the workshops are done. The model itself tries to address that challenge in two ways.

The supplemental activities - so another component - they sort of pick-up in some ways where the workshops leave off. They provide the bulk of program content once the workshop ends.

They kind of look like workshops themselves. A couple may in the course of supplemental activity review workshop materials or do some activities that help them practice it in a different way.

Sometimes the activities cover topics outside of the curricula like financial planning. The idea here is to just give couples as many chances as possible to practice their skills over time. The family support services are then the final component and these were put in place primarily to help face the participation challenge head-on.

We knew it would be an issue regardless because this is a voluntary program and we suspected that it would be even more of a challenge because we would be working with a low-income population who typically have more barriers around many things including logistics like transportation and child care.

So in family support, couples are paired with a staffer and whose job it is to maintain contact with the families, to help address barriers to participation which can involve a lot of different things like making sure they have transportation and child care assistance and then doing things like referring them to community services.

In some sites, the family support staff are also doing one-on-one activities with couples to practice workshop skills with another layer of reinforcement. Okay, moving to slide 5 now.

The MDRC team is in the process now of reflecting on how the management practices have unfolded in SHM over time and in slides 5 and 6, I outline four steps that we've seen sites take in building structures to manage for performance.

I should just start by mentioning that all of the sites are operating under performance-based contracts so it's slightly different than a grant, a little bit more restrictive, a little bit harder for SHM sites certainly and those contracts are managed by MDRC so we are also a conduit for the funding going to the sites and that allows us to monitor with probably more detail than those technical assistance providers would do, what sites are doing on a month-to-month basis.

So in that context, all of the sites again we started with this theory of change and all three of us are talking about this today so why did we think it was important to build a model on a theory of change but I think some developers really wanted the programs to be grounded in research.

Previous studies informed everything about the model, the kinds of goals we hoped that the program could achieve as well as the kinds of services and the contents that would help sites get there and the way in which the services is delivered so drawing on literature around adult learning and so forth.

The marriage education component had much more of a research base to draw on in terms of the content to offer as in family support and supplemental activities were a bit more of an experiment in program design and implementation for the sites.

And as sites got creative with these two components, there ended-up being quite a lot of variation early on and a little bit of drift away from kind of what we saw the core role of those components doing.

And so having this theory of change really helped us focus that development work to make sure that the day-to-day tasks still supported the overall project goal.

Step 2 is using, you know, with a theory of change and a program model neatly in place, we then set quantitative and qualitative benchmarks to give sites some even more concrete day-to-day goals.

On the quantity side, the benchmarks are primarily focused on enrollment, on participation in services over time and the emphasis, when we talk about participation in SHM, the emphasis is really not on how many services the staff deliver like how many workshops are done in a given month.

It's really how many services each couple actually completes and part of the reason we think about it in this way is that implementation, literature and replication literature will refer to this as a dosage effect or dosage.

And I don't particularly like the medical-sounding term but it does get at an important concept that by now we've pretty much drilled into the heads of all the SHM staff which is that each person in the program has to get enough of the program in order to benefit because behavior change takes repetition and practice.

So this sort of echoes some things that Ted was talking about in his presentation so we're really shooting for a minimum number of activities we want couples to complete during the 12 months in the program.

The quality measures for us are really just as important as quantity although it does feel some days like we're just counting - we're doing a lot of counting - but the quality measures, you know, practically speaking we didn't think that we could hope to achieve good participation if the program was boring and poorly done and no fun.

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So the quality measures really focused on things like good facilitation and we had definitions from that that the curriculum developers helped us map out. It included things like creative use of activities and media rather than just lecturing and some of the quality measures also looked at things like all of the staff, the way they interacted with couples and really emphasizing a customer service-oriented strength-based way of delivering services.

I'm moving to slide 6 now. In steps 3 and 4, these are perhaps the most important ones from my perspective, monitoring for performance and then giving feedback to staff.

Benchmarks and quality measures, these are all very necessary. They're good but without a way to monitor to staff performance and then to tell staff how they're doing, the benchmarks really don't end-up meaning all that much and so monitoring and giving feedback to staff and then tweaking daily operations is really where the SHM program managers have spent the bulk of their time and the technical assistance providers as well. That's where we seem to spend most of our time so in order to do this well, managers first have to collect data and they're doing this in two main ways.

One is through an MIS, Management Information System, and this is data that is not just meant for reporting outcomes. We've been working continuously and very closely with the managers and supervisors to learn ways to use the MIS so that they can know every day and every week what's going well and what's not going well in each of the components.

So they're looking at aggregate data like where they are in relation to their benchmarks and then they're looking at individual data like rosters that show which couples miss specific workshops and the individual data like case notes which can tell them whether family support staff are following-up appropriately with couples who have missed workshops and scheduling them for make-up sessions and the like.

The second way that managers are collecting data is by observing staff delivering services to participants and they're using a structured protocol kind of like a checklist that spell out the things that they hope to see happening in each component.

MDRC and our team we've also done quite a lot of observation in the field as part of our technical assistance work and I can say that I've come to be a true believer in observation as a management tool through this process.

I think my experience has been that case notes will tell you one and an important slice of what the staff do but seeing them in action can often tell quite another. Sometimes a better story and sometimes what you observe is really not at all what you want to see but there's really no way to know that until you see if where the rubber hits the road I guess, so to speak.

So, spending time doing observation on a regular basis with staff is part of the expectation that we've set for supervisors in the program. So the managers are definitely collecting a lot of information.

Again, this is a necessary step but insufficient. It has to be put to use and so sites are using their data in several main ways. A lot of staff meetings, typically each one of the teams, the teams are split up like workshop facilitators, family support workers and recruitment workers.

They've typically meeting on a weekly basis if they're teams and then usually the site will have one kind of cross-site meeting but they typically all begin by reviewing performance data against the benchmarks of the group.

And they use this data as a springboard for discussing together what's going well and what' not and I think that this process has been - it was a little rough going - at first because as other folks had mentioned, this process of monitoring is not usually very comfortable for people at least at first.

But doing it in a group setting and encouraging the managers to ask for input from their staff seems to have had the effect of helping the staff take ownership of the benchmarks and to feel involved in the process of brainstorming and coming up with creative solutions for how they're going to meet the challenges that they have in front of them.

So a big point of discussion in meetings for example is who missed the last workshop so they'll pull-out the workshop rosters. They go through the list of names.

It's always amazing to me how many details all of the staff know about a given couple in a group so they'll talk through what are the reasons that the couple may not have come and then they'll strategize what needs to be done as a team to get couples re-engaged so that's one way.

Supervisors are then also doing one-on-one supervision with staff and in most sites this is happening weekly for an hour. part of the supervision process includes what we call case load reviews and this is where supervisors are pulling ten or so active cases and they sit with the staff and they review the activity and the case notes together.

So couple by couple, the supervisor is looking for things like attendance and whether the staff needs to schedule make-up sessions or how long has it been since the last contact with this couple, those kinds of things.

And so what it means is that every six weeks or so, typically the supervisor and staff are cycling through the staff pulled case load and this has helped keep the staff focused on the fact that we care about dosage for every single couple in the program.

Every single couple that's enrolled, not just the participants who show up every week, are good participators, or the couples that have the most pressing issues or the biggest crises.

That sort of tends - they tend to be - ones that may get more of the day-to-day attention from the staff but our goal is to move staff beyond a crisis management mode to thinking about what do I need with each one of the couples that I'm working with.

I don't know that we've perfectly solved that problem of crisis management but we feel like this has been an important step in kind of shifting in that direction.

So a team really through all of these interactions is managers and staff, managers and supervisors holding the staff accountable for their performance. This hasn't meant that people are being fired left and right for low performance at all.

It has meant that supervisors have had to take the time to understand their data to be thoughtful about how they map out improvement plans when they're needed and then they have to take the time to track their progress, to feed it back to the staff and then they start all over again. It really isn't a process that ends until the program itself is all done.

On slide 7 now, this all sounds pretty time-intensive and it is. Each site has a full-time program manager just dedicated to SHM and about three full-time supervisors.

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Some are overseeing more than one component or task but they're focusing a lot of their time on assessing the data and on training staff so just to back up just a bit, one thing that's really helped structure the managers and supervisors' work is that SHM has relied heavily on written curricula and protocols.

From a research perspective, this helps us lend consistency across the sites and then as we and the managers did more observation, the documents had to be modified which has meant that staff had to be continuously retrained which is pretty time-consuming and I'm sure most of you are aware.

So this requires quite a lot of planning from the supervisors and what I have seen, they seem to gravitate more towards using the weekly team meeting time to do sort of mini-training sessions since it's often complicated to take all the staff off-line for even a half a day at a time to do those trainings.

So I'm on slide 8 now, my last one. I'm going to leave with a few thoughts, some other work that MDRC has been focused on thinking about the intersection of marriage and fatherhood programs and where the two can really bolster each other to reach common goals.

And I think that perhaps a principle both share is that involvement from both parents is really the ultimate prevention strategy for children. We have been attentive to work by (Phil) and (Carolyn Colin) and others looking at how important it is to involve both parents and parenting and relationship interventions.

And since systems really mostly don't reflect this way of thinking, one can imagine some creative work to be done in building attention to fatherhood in relationship program content into various settings like community colleges, Head Start programs, nurse home visiting programs, employment programs, and then kind of a fifth side is one that can also imagine building-out from current fatherhood and marriage education programs so that they're better linked to the public systems that participants are often interacting with.

So that's one point. I think a second point is in terms of linking the fatherhood and the marriage worlds, I think SHM gives an interesting example of a marriage program that has made a big push to incorporate things like dads groups and fatherhood curricula into their supplemental activities as a way to make sure that the programs really address the dads.

It just became really, really obvious to us that if we were going to get the participation rates that we were hoping for, we had to get the dads on board and so in addition to making sure that sites are hiring male staff and in all the different positions, facilitators, family support, recruiters, that the content was really geared toward things that dads were interested in.

So we've got a few folks for example using the 24/7 dads curriculum as part of their supplemental activity menu. I think there are lots of other venues like parenting and other focus programs like the prenatal services.

We can think of ways to better incorporate and acknowledge the fact that there is a dad in the mix and that partners and exes are part of the mix that families and parents are dealing with.

And there may also be room on the fatherhood side for fatherhood programs to look at times when having both mom and dad in the room can be beneficial and may actually make participation better in those programs.

And the last thought, something that I've been chewing on is how the skills that are taught in these curricula, I think fatherhood and marriage alike can be applicable in different domains. Future programs might more explicitly relate the skills that are taught in these curricula to other areas of work in parenting.

For example time out is a concept that's covered in all the curricula used in SHM so the idea that when two people have a conflict, it gets too heated and the workshops kind of teach couple skills for deciding mutually is that they're going to set the topic aside, take a break and they're going to agree to come back to it to discuss it when they're both cooled off and they can say a little bit more calmly what it is they need to say.

So this is a skill that can be equally useful with spouses as with toddlers as with a challenging boss at work so making those connections more explicit for participants could be a useful wave for the future and that's just a sampling of things that are discussed in the paper that's noted on the bottom of slide - I think it's slide 8 now - by (Ginger Knox), (Phil) and (Carolyn Colin) and (Ilana Bildner) that has just come out and it's hosted on MDRC's Website.

So thank you. I will look forward to your questions.

Nigel Vann: Well, thank you very much, Jennifer. Very illuminating, yes, and I certainly encourage everybody to take a look at that article that Jennifer just mentioned if you haven't had a chance to get it, you can see the MDRC Website there, mdrc.org if you want to go download that.

I again encourage you to go back to the clearinghouse Website and have a look at some of the research briefs and articles there if you haven't done that recently, there is some good stuff there, just as you think about where you're going moving forward, I think you may find some good things there again.

Let me ask you one follow-up question Jennifer just in terms of the idea of the dosage effect which I thought was really interesting. It occurred to me that if a program is struggling with people who are not completing the course but you've got some people who've completed it, that would be a good way to be able to show okay, well the people who got the most, we have more outcomes for.

Have you been able to see that yet in the initial data for supporting healthy marriages? You there, Jennifer?

Jennifer Miller: Sorry. I had you on mute to cut my buzzing noise here, sorry, so I actually am not able to answer that yet. We're still at a point or because SHM is a random assignment evaluation, we are also doing things like surveys, looking at having participants answer questions about behavior change and the like over time but it's a very long process because we're also doing that with a control group.

And so we think we'll focus on dosage because what we're trying to - the goal is - to hope to get to an intervention that is robust enough to produce a difference between this group - between the program group - and the group of folks in the control group who are still getting services out in the community, you know, whatever happens to be available so that's kind of driving our concern with dosage per person.

Nigel Vann: Okay, great, well anyway, I did think it was an interesting idea for other people think about as you look at your own individual program data to perhaps make a distinction between those who got the higher dosage versus those who didn't.

We've got a question - well, it's not really a question - well, it is a question. Somebody's asked what they've done - this is referring to the letter-respective surveys that Ted referred to and also Steve a little bit - you know, there's a notion that we can go back and capture behavioral change after the fact.

And this person said that what they've actually done in their post-test survey is they've added a question that reads can you share something you have done differently because of this program and the person's asking is that a good idea?

It certainly sounds like a good idea to me but I just wondered if Ted or Steve what you think of that.

Ted Strader: Well, this is Ted. I can tell you that it's very positive and it's a great way to get again a report of a changed behavior. Some people will tell you good things that aren't true. That is the case.

However, if you can organize a series of questions that line up with the open-ended question such as was written by the questioner - I didn't see the question but I heard you paraphrase it - yes, you can get meaningful behavioral change data from a retrospective survey.

The trouble is it's hard to publish data in a peer-review journal. Peer-review journals want you to have a pre-test, a post-test after the program, and then a long-term follow-up three to six months to a year to five years after the program was implemented so when you're talking about behavioral change, retrospectives are a great way from a programming perspective.

They're a great way for a program to write reports to the board and to funders but it's not going to get you into the published journals venue and most of us aren't anyway but that's just the point is retrospectives really help you rule out the they didn't know what they didn't know and giving you bad results kinds of data.

They really help you with that but to brag about retrospective surveys in a room full of research scientists will not get you applause.

Nigel Vann: Okay, yes, but they may help you make your program better and that's what we're most concerned about, right?

Ted Strader: Absolutely.

Steven Nordseth: Yes, I think that's 100% true. That's one of the questions where you add that to your survey based on what you're trying to figure out. What are clients taking from our services and that's what it's going to tell you.

And you know, it may not be something that can go into a spreadsheet but that's something you could put for instance into a narrative of a report you're sending to your project officer or if it's for some other kind of grant, we include client comments all the time, snapshots of what they're getting and it can be really good for success stories and it can really tell you where you want to change your program.

For instance, if everybody's giving you the same response, everybody is taking only one tidbit out of an entire 10-week curriculum like for us, we need to start thinking about what makes this so impactful and what makes the other stuff so forgettable so yes, I think it's a great question to use to improve your program.

Nigel Vann: Great. Okay. I've got a couple more questions. We are getting a bit on. Let me just tell you guys what the one question is so you can think about and I'll come back to this after we do the survey questions with the audience but I'm just wondering if you can think a little bit about any future directions that you might be thinking of for your individual program based on the program data you've been seeing to date and/or your reading of other research like the research that Jennifer was sharing with us.

But before we get to that one, I did just want to follow-up on the question I said raised at the beginning of the webinar about the fact that it is so hard to capture the work that everybody's doing in terms of long-term outcomes particularly when you can't follow folk on a long-term basis.

But yet everybody I talk to in the field, they feel like they're touching the lives of these fathers and we do have research that shows you fairly conclusively that children do do better when their dads are positively involved so do you think it's enough programmatically for us to be able to show that you are getting dads more involved in positive ways, that we can then assure them that's going to lead to these longer-term outcomes? Is that something that's valid and that's a question for whoever wants to jump in on that.

Ted Strader: Well, this is Ted and I'd like to jump in on it. First of all, for all my fellow program practitioners, the answer is yes, unequivocally yes. If you're getting dads more involved in their children's lives and they're saying it publicly and they're saying it with pride, then I promise that you're making an impact that's worthy of the time spent.

Now proving that to someone is a whole other question but there's no question in my mind as a program practitioner who comes from the passion and who comes from the field, fathers making a significant investment are making positive differences.

Now the question comes in is yes, but what's the quality of their interactions with their children? That's why we also try to measure the skills that they've learned in a program.

An all-caring dad who's still using corporal punishment to correct his children cares about them and he wants to see them behave in positive and socially-acceptable ways and succeed but becomes excited and passionate and strikes them or hits them or calls them names, well then you're going to get a question from a researcher saying well, have you increased the quality of that person's life?

Well, you might have mixed results based on other skills. That's why it's important to have a pretty broad understanding of programs and the skills and practices that you're trying to impact. Am I making sense with that?

Nigel Vann: Sure. Yes, yes.

Steven Nordseth: Yes, well from our perspective, I think it really depends on who you're trying to prove that the program is successful and for us, just that simple information would be more than enough to demonstrate to our administration that this program is worthwhile and is successful and is making an impact in the lives of both parents and children.

And I would go so far as to say it would be enough to demonstrate to our FPO that this is a successful program and it's making a difference. Whether or not that's going to approve anything or get you a document in some kind of research journal, well obviously probably not but I think most of us - are you guys still there?

Nigel Vann: Yes, we're still here. Keep going. That's on someone's phone, Steve.

Steven Nordseth: Got you. So yes, in terms of whether or not it's going to get you published in a research journal probably not but most of us ought to know what's going on but most of us really aren't trying to do that.

We're just trying to impact the lives of our fathers. We're trying to have a successful program and in our opinion, that is successful enough, yes, I would say that.

Nigel Vann: Great, okay, yes, and I think it's sort of it goes back to what I said at the beginning that if you can focus on what your individual program's doing but tie that in in concert to what some of the larger research studies are showing like the work that MDRC is doing, you can then make the case a bit more positively to other potential funders.

Okay, so let me bring Matt on to walk us through the survey and then I'll ask everybody just for a closing thought.

Matt Crews: All right, great. Everybody bring your attention to the screen please. The first phone question is I have a better understanding of ways to build on lessons learned from research regarding behavioral change in adult learning?

You have six options on the screen: strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree and at the bottom of the screen there's no vote. I'll give everyone a moment to answer that.

All right. The second question, the advice and suggestions of ways to work as an evaluation and program service team to assess program performance was helpful. Once again, you have six options, a no vote in the bottom left-hand corner.

All right. The third question or poll asks is I have a more complete understanding of how to adjust program strategies based on data evaluation.

Give everybody a couple more seconds to answer that one. All right. And lastly, I received information that I can use in my work with fathers to keep the program focused on real change for participants.

All right, a couple more moments. All right, thank you all for participating and I will give it back to Nigel now.

Nigel Vann: Okay, thank you very much, Matt. We did get a couple of questions come in at the last minute here and what I'll say to that is we will try and address these when we get this community of practice up.

I think this is a great way we'll able to do this. The couple of people who asked the question, and if you did want to just send me an e-mail afterwards, I can have the presenters respond to you directly in a more immediate fashion.

There was one immediate question that Steve might be able to answer. Someone just wants to know what database are you using, Steve?

Steven Nordseth: So for us we use an internal database that's created by a technical assistance firm that we've been working with for several years and what they basically have created is an online database that can be accessed from any computer.

I can access that database from my home computer or I can access it directly here from the work computer and the database serves several difference functions.

Primarily for me its primary function is really to input data and then to pull reports so when I come to the end of a month or the end of a contract period, I can type in the different values that I want to measure and it will punch out a report for me so I don't have to go back and forth and hand-count data or hand-count from a spreadsheet.

So it's really useful in that regard but it also does a variety of other things for the agency. Like I said, we've got a really large agency with about 20 different programs and a hundred and some odd staff so the database serves functions far beyond just data entry.

It goes all the way to reserving different counseling rooms and you can post calendars and schedules on the database but like I said, primarily for me, it's a place where I can input data and the retrieve data in a meaningful way.

And there was a question kind of about where we want to go in the future that was posed earlier and for me, a place where I want to go in the future is to not only be able to input data and pull out reports in terms of numbers and spreadsheets, what I'd like to be able to do is input data and then enter in certain variables I want to measure and then it will actually produce either a graph or a pie chart.

Some of those examples I showed you, those are created by hand which is why they're kind of rudimentary and kind of entry-level but if I can get the database to take certain variables and then produce useful graphs and charts for presentations or reports, that's really where I'd like to be at the end of this year.

Nigel Vann: Okay, yes and I'm sure that there are databases out there that do that yes but anyway I would encourage people to ask Steve all about that directly or once again once we get the community of practice up we can share that kind of information a bit more readily.

So Ted, let me just give you a brief moment just to share anything that you may be thinking about in terms of future directions as you think about beyond this current funding period.

Ted Strader: Well, a couple of things, Nigel, strike me profoundly. One is is that in the conversation you heard about dosage, in multiple fields not just in marriage and fatherhood fields but in substance abuse, in family strengthening field, we're seeing that dosage really does matter.

And that's the question of how much program do participants get and how much does it take to get behavioral - again, behavioral - change and it probably takes more contact time than most of us would like to believe.

Generally it's over 20 hours of direct contact time. Our program for example and you said it was listed on the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices, that means we have published multiple research journal articles and the researchers have researched the validity of our researchers and we've passed the test.

Our program's 40 hours, 20 hours a week, I'm sorry, two hours a week for 20 weeks in a row and we have make-up sessions if people miss it. We have programs on video that they can capture what they missed and the dosage really does matter so getting people recruited and getting them to participate matters but maintaining participation with appropriate exercises and pleasure and fun and food and festivities and celebrations for successes, all those things really matter in most fields and I suspect it would be true in the marriage field.

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And that's part of why I made the cross-over to come say. I moved from the substance abuse field to the family strengthening field to marriage and fatherhood because I think the research that we've done in those areas matters.

And I want to applaud all the folks who have been working on the marriage and fatherhood grants and to take the lessons learned over the last four years the next year and come back and find further funding but bring the research desire, bring the evaluation desire in because it's really how we move the human race forward, learning how we impact each other in positive way so thanks for the opportunity to say something.

Dosage matters. Good intentions matters. Passion matters and engagement and maintaining engagement matters and evaluators really help us program people figure out how to do that.

And remember when a program manager hires an evaluator, the evaluator works for the program manager. It's not the other way around.

Nigel Vann: Great, okay, so wonderful thoughts there Ted and yes, I do apologize that we've gone a little bit over time but I trust it's been useful for everybody. I do want to remind you our next webinar will be September 21st.

You'll get information about that in early September and look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the August conference and this sounds like a conversation to be continued there.

Jennifer, we certainly appreciate all your input. I'll just give you the opportunity for any closing thought and then the presenters can stay on the line and I'll bid adieu to everybody else.

Operator: She has disconnected.

Nigel Vann: Oh, okay, well thank you very much, so sorry we lost Jennifer there. I know she was having some phone problems so we thank everybody for their time and we'll catch you all next time and a big thanks again to our presenters who did a wonderful job.

Ted Strader: Thank you.

Operator: That does conclude our conference. We thank you for your participation.

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