Relationships Matter:
Strengthening Vulnerable Youth

Proceedings Summary

national healthy marriage resource center

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

INNOVATION CENTER for community & youth development

This is a product of the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, led by co-directors Mary Myrick, APR, Jeanette Hercik, PhD, and project manager, Patrick Patterson, MSW, MPH.

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"Relationships are really what we're all about. That's what our lifetime is about – our relationships with ourselves, with each other, with our environment, with the world we live in… I'm so happy that we all think relationships are important. Because at the end of our life, relationships are really all we have." *– Emma Harris, Boys & Girls Club of the Northern Cheyenne Nation*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Relationships matter. They especially matter to young people. Although many youth development programs recognize the importance of relationships for youth, very few teach relationship skills to help young people manage intimate partner relationships. These skills are especially important for youth in vulnerable circumstances such as being low-income, system-involved, runaway/homeless, or disconnected from school or work. The youth who are in these and other unique situations are referred to here as "disadvantaged youth" or "vulnerable youth." Thirty-five leaders and practitioners from the youth development and relationship education fields convened to discuss the needs of disadvantaged youth and the capacity of the field to deliver relationship education to this population.

Seven key themes emerged from the conference:

1. **Relationship education is essential** – Youth leaders and practitioners broadly agreed that the need for relationship education in youth work is apparent.
2. **Relationship education is a development strategy** – Healthy intimate partner relationships can have a positive impact on young people's lives.
3. **Defining relationship education** – Relationship education is focused on skill building, interpersonal skills, safety, knowing oneself and setting the stage for healthy marriage.
4. **A holistic understanding of relationship education: benefits and challenges** - Relationship education can serve a variety of purposes for youth from equipping them with the skills to have healthy intimate relationships to enhancing their peer and adult relationships.
5. **Relationship education is not just an outcome** – Youth development professionals can model healthy relationships as well as teach relationship skills.
6. **How do we best deliver relationship education?** – Relationship education may be delivered as a curriculum and through an experiential learning model; these strategies may be stand-alone programs or integrated into the spectrum of youth development services.
7. **Relationship education in context** – There is no one-size-fits-all approach to delivering relationship education to youth; the content and service delivery method must resonate with the youth you are trying to reach.

The primary implications of this forum were to find common ground to bring the fields of youth development and relationship education together and identify strategies for action. The conference participants discussed the need to communicate the concept and value of relationship

education to a diverse group of stakeholders. Youth too need to be part of the conversation. The suggested strategy includes the development of appropriate resources for youth and practitioners; evaluating existing programs; training youth development staff in relationship skills; and researching relationship behaviors and attitudes among vulnerable youth. These actions can help leaders in the youth development and relationship education fields galvanize public will around healthy relationships and relationship education.

INTRODUCTION

Relationships, one could argue, are the stuff of humans. We do not live in isolation; from birth we interact with others in our lives – parents, siblings, friends, teachers, neighbors, loved ones – and enmesh ourselves in a web of relationships that shape our persons and the trajectory of our lives. We live every day in the context of these relationships. When these relationships are unhealthy, the effects can be devastating to a human being. It has been the experience of relationship education professionals that vulnerable youth – low income, homeless, gang or system involved youth – experience the sometimes crippling results of an unhealthy relationship's negative influences with a disproportionate severity. Vulnerable youth often lack the safety net or access to resources and supportive adults from which other youth benefit. When unhealthy relationships lead them to drugs, violence, dropping out of school, or unplanned parenthood, it often launches them on a trajectory of other high-risk and negative behaviors.

For years, the youth development field has recognized relationships as essential components and outcomes of their work. As young people begin to form their own identities and transition into adulthood, relationships – particularly romantic relationships – take on a critical importance. For the youth worker, equipping the young person with the skills they need to navigate all forms of relationships – be they romantic relationships or relationships at school, work, or with friends or family members – is a necessary part of preparing youth to thrive as healthy, self-sufficient, and successful adults. In this way, relationship education, defined in the general sense by the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) as "providing individuals and couples with a lifelong skill set for all forms and types of relationships," fits nicely within the broader goals of youth development and NHMRC's express mission to provide experts, researchers, policymakers, media, marriage educators, couples, individuals, and program providers with high quality information and resources that promote healthy marriages.

Currently, the youth development and relationship education fields operate as distinct entities. However, both fields recognize the critical nature of relationships in a young person's life. Relationships – especially intimate relationships – often have extensive power to influence the choices young people make for themselves. This influence may be either positive or negative. Healthy relationships can promote resilience in youth, but when relationships go wrong they may distract or totally disrupt a young person's plans for succeeding in work, education, and family. Recognizing this, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the NHMRC (for more information on these organizations, see "About Our Partners") convened a group of relationship education and youth development professionals to explore issues related to helping vulnerable young people manage their intimate relationships in ways that support their education, work, and family and

co-parenting goals. There has been a steady growth in social programs and policies aimed at helping low-income youth meet the challenges of adolescence, violence, racism, poverty, and their transition to adulthood. Most of these programs place an emphasis on creating pathways to education and work by preventing specific problem behaviors such as unprotected sex, violence, school failure, substance abuse and unemployment; however, an issue-focused approach does not necessarily create social and emotional competence among these disenfranchised young people. This meeting was convened to discuss how (if at all) young people are given information about how to successfully navigate the minefields of young adult relationships, make wise partner choices, avoid abusive and harmful relationships, and learn healthy relationship skills – all fundamental competencies in thriving and self-sufficient adults. If young people are to overcome their disadvantaged situations, it may be necessary for youth programs to address healthy intimate relationships as they are the foundation upon which all other successes stand.

Practitioners, researchers, and funders deeply involved with youth development and/or relationship education traveled from across the United States to share their unique experiences, backgrounds, interests, passions, and ideas. The conference's participant list reflects this intended bridging of fields. The NHMRC co-hosted the meeting and the Innovation Center for Community & Youth Development, a Washington, DC-based non-profit organization, facilitated the gathering. The two and a half day meeting, held at the Airlie Conference Center in Warrenton, Virginia, October 5-7, 2009, was designed to be part think-tank and part learning community; it sought to build the capacity of the relationship education field to work with disadvantaged youth. The highly interactive structure of its plenary sessions and presentations fostered the kind of challenging conversation that pushes for clarity and results. These conversations worked toward three specific objectives:

1. Engage practitioners and leaders in the youth development field in an interactive dialogue about relationship education and the intimate relationships of disadvantaged youth.

2. Identify issues related to helping vulnerable young people deal responsibly, safely, and effectively with their intimate relationship in order to help them achieve their education, work, and family goals.

3. Identify the most promising strategies to help young people learn how to have successful relationships and which creative avenues can be used to effectively reach youth.

A final goal of the meeting was to develop this product to highlight conference findings, and share knowledge with other leaders and frontline practitioners in the youth development and relationship education fields. This paper describes key themes that surfaced at the conference and, informed by conference conversations, attempts to add body to the issues. It also discusses implications of the issues raised and potential next steps for the larger field to move the work forward. The goal of this paper is to spark further discussion about relationship education and healthy relationships and, ultimately, turn ideas into action.

THEMATIC HIGHLIGHTS

RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION IS ESSENTIAL

> ***"Everyone here realizes that relationships are indeed important. There's no convincing here that this is an important step."*** *– Michelle Quinn-Davidson, YouthBuild USA*

Public perception of youth development and relationship education work is that the two fields operate within wholly distinct realms. However, most youth development leaders, even those without previous formal relationship education experience, reported that addressing topics of youth and their relationships was not just necessary, but obvious and long overdue.

Most participants arrived at the conference having already thought deeply about the role relationships play in the lives of vulnerable youth and, to the extent possible, incorporating relationship education into their direct service work, though not always with a focus on intimate partner relationships or through a formal curriculum. Conference proceedings moved forward and grew from this point.

The need for more intentional relationship education in youth work is apparent. The demand for resources, partners, and funding to this end is great. And, most importantly, there exists across the United States a group of professionals committed to this work.

RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION IS A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

> ***"It is by virtue of relationships that people are willing to change more."*** *– Deborah Shore, Sasha Bruce Youthwork, Inc.*

A focus on vulnerable youth provides ample opportunities to focus on the negative. However, conference participants felt it important to recognize that what brought them to this meeting – what, in many cases, compelled them to travel great distances to this meeting – was their belief in the *positive* potential of relationships.

Intimate relationships *can* have a positive impact on young people's lives. A healthy relationship and the security and personal development it brings can encourage a youth in his or her academic, work and family or co-parenting goals. It can spur a sense of responsibility, commitment, and engagement. It can guide a young person to wide-sweeping positive changes in his or her life and, in many cases, the life of his or her own child. A commitment to this stance –in the face of countless negative influences facing vulnerable youth – implicitly underlines all of the work done and progress made at this conference. It is this belief and this hope that drives the work.

DEFINING RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION

> ***"One of the things we do here, beyond the [National Healthy Marriage] Resource Center, is to find out from folks what they think it [relationship education] is, and then have them understand what it really is."*** *– Patrick Patterson, National Healthy Marriage Resource Center*

The opening session of the conference challenged participants to define relationship education. It became clear that "relationship education" is not a static term; rather, it signifies different things to different people. The intent of the meeting was to address the need for *intimate* relationship education for vulnerable youth, a strategy that often implies curriculum and skill-based interventions. Nevertheless, conference participants' discussions about the practice of relationship education in their own experiences and organizations suggest that intimate relationship education is one important piece of relationship competency for youth.

Conference participants discussed several potential definitions for "relationship education" and shared how these conceptions of the work apply (or do not apply) to their experiences.

- "Providing individuals and couples with a lifelong skill set, rooted in knowledge and skill-based interventions, for all forms and types of relationships"
- "Setting the stage for healthy marriage"
- "Building skills to manage intimate relationships"
- "Teaching effective communication and interpersonal skills for couples and individuals"
- "Keeping youth safe in relationships and providing facts about reproductive health"
- "Providing practical skills that help young people thrive"
- "Learning about and being your best self in the context of another"

After an initial discussion of the proposed definitions, participants were asked to select the definition that best reflected their personal understanding of relationship education – then that of their funders and of their youth. When asked to consider relationship education from another's perspective, it was evident that relationship education can serve a variety of purposes – never was there a unanimous consensus on a definition among participants, and rarely did an individual participant's understanding of relationship education match with either or both that of their funders or their youth. This fluidity of purpose for relationship education is both an advantage and a challenge. Moving the relationship education field forward in the context of youth development requires a common understanding of what the work is about; however, the field's flexibility allows relationship education to meet a host of needs for vulnerable youth. The relationship education field can seek to improve intimate relationships among vulnerable youth, while gaining a better understanding of its impact on other types of relationships as well.

A HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

> ***"Relationship education is a big umbrella. It's the idea of giving young people these skills – however, wherever we're working – so that… after they leave us they can go on and thrive in their lives."*** *– Michael Piraino, National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association*

In discussing funders' conceptions of relationship education, there was an obvious tension among participants regarding the relationship education needs they perceived on the ground and the perceived intent of funders. Holistic understandings of relationship education pervaded as popular ideals among conference participants. Direct youth workers spoke candidly about youth's multifaceted relationship needs, including communication skills, information about abuse and sexually transmitted infections, parenting resources, and financial literacy, just to name a few. Relationship education has the potential to meet a myriad of needs, equipping youth with a skill set for their intimate, as well as other, relationships. It also situates youth in an ongoing process of personal development, preparing them for the challenges of adult lives.

But while a holistic approach to relationship education was the popular ideal, it remained just that – an ideal. Funding sources are often limited to a specific aspect of youth development (i.e. education, housing, food/nutrition, reproductive health, employment, etc.) which inhibits an organization's capacity to deliver holistic services that include relationship education. Furthermore, when survival – finding food and shelter, and addressing basic health needs – is a youth's primary concern, there is rarely room or opportunity to deliver formal relationship education. These limitations are an everyday reality for direct service providers and a significant challenge to educating youth about healthy relationships. Nevertheless, youth workers attending the conference remained committed to the value of relationship education for vulnerable youth, integrating aspects of relationship education into their ongoing work with young people.

RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION IS NOT JUST AN OUTCOME

> ***"We need to view relationships as inputs, interventions, and outcomes."*** *– Teri Behrens, Johnson Center for Philanthropy*

The push for a clear definition of relationship education elucidated further ambiguities. In discussing conceptions of relationship education and the pragmatic ways in which relationship education reaches vulnerable youth, conference participants spoke of two distinct scenarios for their work. These scenarios beg the questions: "What is the object of the relationship education? Who are the players and what are their roles?"

In the first scenario, relationship education focuses on the relationships youth themselves hold. Here, a professional delivering the relationship education via a curriculum works with the youth

so that they may apply healthy relationship skills and knowledge to the relationships in their lives. In this model, healthy relationships are the intended *outcome*. In the second scenario, relationship education is primarily concerned with the interactions – expressly *not* intimate – between the youth and the relationship education practitioner. While curriculum may guide the interaction, this process is far less formal than traditional approaches. Practitioners model healthy relationship behavior so that youth learn healthy relationships by seeing and doing; by engaging with the practitioner, youth put these healthy relationship practices into action. This model relies on a process of trust-building to guide a young person to positive lifestyle changes. Healthy relationships are indeed an intended outcome, but there is an equal, if not greater, emphasis on healthy relationships as an *input* and *intervention* in the life of a vulnerable youth. In this scenario, healthy relationships are a catalyst for change.

These two scenarios are not mutually exclusive. In fact, it was when these scenarios overlapped – direct, traditional relationship education complemented by a safe relationship with a practitioner in which to model and practice healthy relationship behaviors – that conference participants expressed the most excitement. This idea possesses great potential as a promising practice for further relationship education work.

HOW DO WE BEST DELIVER RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION?

> ***"When do we pursue relationships as the focal work, and when do relationships need to be embedded in other kinds of accomplishments?"*** *– Martha Moorehouse, US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning & Evaluation*

The delivery of relationship education is ripe for further exploration, especially in collaboration with youth development work. Traditionally, young people receive relationship education via a formal curriculum. Representatives from The National Crittenton Foundation and YouthBuild USA spoke about their experiences with curricula such as Within My Reach and Love Notes, respectively. These curricula require structured meetings and progression of material; both Crittenton and YouthBuild have integrated these curricula into their other work with vulnerable youth, though they could function as stand-alone relationship education programs.

There are alternatives to delivering relationship education as a curriculum, alternatives with which youth development professionals are deeply familiar. Youth development programming is not always curriculum-based; young people may also gain leadership skills, practice civic engagement, and develop a sense of personal agency through experiential learning and other hands-on activities. The core components of relationship education – with an emphasis on communication and interpersonal skills, trust, and responsibility – have always been an implicit part of this work. Nontraditional relationship education has been integrated into these long-standing programs. In organizations with the appropriate capacity, these programs may serve as a foundation for adding a more formal curriculum component in order to address intimate relationships more directly and thereby enhance services.

When bridging the fields of relationship education and youth development, this stand-alone vs. integrated dichotomy provides interesting questions for debate. Which method is best suited for relationship education with vulnerable youth? How can the relationship education field broaden its understanding of relationship education competencies so that youth can gain these competencies outside of or in addition to formal coursework in a way that is effective? And how can the youth development field adapt and integrate a relationship education curriculum into its larger, holistic goals for youth? These questions, perhaps more so than any others raised during the conference, demand further research and evaluation. The challenge will be to match interventions to specific individual and organizational realities. This exploration demands a rigorous awareness of and attention to context as well as an organization's existing programmatic strengths.

RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION IN CONTEXT

Time and again participants raised issues that forced us to consider the context of the work. Issues of context were a central theme in the meeting, reflecting participants' deep commitment to diversity and inclusiveness.

> ***"Those of us who work with young people are in relationships with young people. And the only way they'll experience the kind of relationships we're hoping for is that they're actually in them with us."*** *– Anisha Chablani, Roca*

It is clear that one-size-fits-all relationship education is not a viable solution; young people come from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, with unique experiences and expectations, and at different stages of personal development. For relationship education to be effective with vulnerable youth it must be relevant – and to be relevant it must adapt to context. Conference participants currently implementing a relationship education curriculum spoke about outdated materials – case studies that do not apply to today's political context, and photos of couples wearing dated clothing – as a challenge they faced in their efforts to communicate to youth that the work mattered in and pertained to their lives. But tools for teaching healthy relationship skills are not the only aspects of the work that must be contextually appropriate; the actual content of relationship education, as well as the forum and methods used to deliver this content, need to resonate with young people. Content should address modern and pertinent relationship practices; it should reach young people in an atmosphere in which they feel comfortable, perhaps not a traditional classroom setting but rather an informal coffee shop discussion group, for example; and it should include interactive media as means to share relationship information. This attention to context challenges us to create alternative ways of approaching relationship education for modern youth.

The term "healthy" also arose as a contextual issue during the conference. "What *is* a healthy relationship anyway?" one participant asked. The point of the question is clear: healthy is a relative term; like the term relationship education, it means different things to different people. Unfortunately, there is little research on relationships among disadvantaged youth because of the challenge associated with identifying them to participate in surveys. Existing research discussed in the meeting highlighted the rapid rate at which vulnerable youth enter into cohabiting and sexual relationships, but little is known about the quality of these relationships. The recognition of the relative nature of "healthy" does not imply a lowering of standards; in fact, conference participants agreed on the need for indicators of positive and healthy relationship behavior so as to avoid abusive and decidedly unhealthy relationships. However, realistic constructions of "healthy" may vary from culture to culture and from person to person. For some youth, a healthy relationship may entail a traditional and chaste dating relationship; for others, amiable interactions with their child's mother or father. Marriage, conference participants noted, may not always be a healthy, appropriate or, in the case of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning) youth or undocumented immigrants, a legally permitted outcome.

Nevertheless, conference participants recognized that a core body of skills such as effective non-violent communication, commitment, and responsibility contributes to the relationship's healthy nature; it is these skills that inform the fundamentals of the work.

Experiences of trauma and healing are an unfortunate reality for many vulnerable youth, and conference participants discussed how a contextualized approach to relationship education must also be sensitive to these issues. Healing from trauma is an extended process, and one that affects a young person's relationships. In many instances of trauma and healing, relationship education takes on a much more process – rather than outcome – oriented approach. Under these circumstances, trust, commitment, responsibility and other healthy relationship behaviors can be experienced and practiced through a consistent and affirming relationship with a youth worker. This relationship gives the young person the opportunity to heal and prepare themselves emotionally for intimate relationships.

IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The final day of the meeting, conference participants divided into small groups to delve even more deeply into the themes they identified as significant over the previous two days. These six themes are all part of an emerging strategy to increase access and opportunities for vulnerable youth to learn about healthy relationships: context, youth involvement, resources, programming, evaluation, and galvanizing policy and public will. Three questions guided conversations about these themes:

1. What is this area/theme all about?
2. What are the priorities for action?
3. What resources or supports can we currently offer?

These conversations were a central feature of the conference. They allowed for focused discussions that truly pushed the relationship education field forward. The summaries below capture the essence of these conversations and lay out implications for practitioners, researchers, and funders in both the relationship education and youth development fields.

CONTEXT

"Context," this group of participants decided, "is everything." More specifically, in this discussion context refers to the ways in which we practice relationship education and frame it for the greater public. Because relationship education is people-centered and community-centered, practitioners must be sensitive to the individual experiences and cultural constructs youth bring to the work. As a field, this group noted, we must also take into account different cultural understandings of "healthy." Devising work plans and resources that function within given contexts will make relationship education more relevant for the vulnerable youth it reaches.

Contextualizing relationship education as a field and an agenda makes the work relevant to those not directly touched by the work. To truly push a healthy relationships agenda, this group felt we must "sell" and communicate the concept and the value of relationship education. To do this we must "package" relationship education for different outlets such as schools (as a strategy for educational success), or corporations (as a benefit to their employees), or to the sexuality education community (as a mechanism to prevent unplanned pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections). When the field is relevant to a diverse group of stakeholders, the conversation

around healthy relationships expands. To do this, it was suggested that greater awareness needs to be raised about how relationship education improves lives, society, and even the business community.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

A healthy relationships agenda for youth has to "walk the talk." In other words, relationship education must necessarily involve young people in all stages of the development and implementation processes.

Several strategies were suggested for achieving this increased youth involvement. At a programmatic level, youth can provide insights into creating programs and/or curricula in their own language, and applicable to their own goals. Youth may also review existing curricula and make a strong case for the development of new resources or the adaptation of current materials and activities. Youth are the keepers of their own powerful stories - stories that have the potential to inform and catalyze issue advocacy, whether it be at a local level or on Capitol Hill. Rather than starting anew, this process of increasing youth involvement in this arena should begin with the curriculum and resources that programs use now.

RESOURCES

The conversation about resources and relationship education focused on both the production of new kinds of resources and on the role resources can play in moving a healthy relationships agenda forward. The group identified several ideas for new resources that reflect modern healthy relationships and will serve to benefit both individuals and organizations in their work. Such resources included trainings, knowledge and position papers, and skill-building sessions that use youth voice. Other potential resources included an interactive, web-based resource, modeled on popular social media sites like Facebook or Twitter. Resources, opportunities or curriculums for college-age young adults surfaced as a potential avenue for relationship education work; it was the feeling among group members that, at this age, young people are particularly open to this kind of knowledge. In all of these resources the power of stories is central. Stories about programs and the youth involved should inform and be a major part of these resources.

As part of a nationwide strategy, leveraging new and existing resources to raise awareness and involvement in relationship education is a priority. Identifying a common intersection – such as school-based work – would allow for the delivery of relationship education to large groups of youth. Promoting relationship education to such a widespread audience gains the work advocates and stakeholders.

PROGRAMMING

Programming entails ways to leverage the success of existing programs. By integrating healthy relationship language, content, and strategies into current programs, and by updating existing curricula, we may be able to reach more young people with this work and more quickly. Updating and adapting existing curricula to their target population is priority. Staff training goes hand in hand with new or modified programming. With trainings in relationship education and youth development, program staff will be equipped to integrate healthy relationship

content into their ongoing work. Sharing our knowledge about the specific needs and trends of these populations will be crucial in this process of improving relationship education in youth programs.

EVALUATION

One conference participant asked, "How do you measure a relationship?" Both YouthBuild and the National Crittenton Foundation use pre and post surveys to measure the change in knowledge and attitudes of participants in their healthy relationship programs; however, participants noted there is yet no commonly used theory of change that conceptualizes youth's relationships as an input, intervention, and output. In advancing the field of relationship education, the priority, from an evaluation perspective, is to articulate and disseminate this theory of change. An effective theory of change will treat relationships as an input, intervention, and outcome. It will contextualize outcomes, measuring them as ends themselves, but also as they relate to youth development competencies. Also, by tying healthy relationship outcomes to youth development outcomes, well-designed studies can make the case for the value of relationship education – to individuals, organizations, and funders.

Participants identified several priorities for action such as scanning past and current evaluations that study relationship outcomes. They also emphasized the need to develop indicators and measures for *positive* relationships.

PUBLIC POLICY AND WILL

The central question for this group, and the pressing question for relationship education and youth development professions, is "Should we create a national policy on healthy relationships?" A suggested answer: The relationship education field should at least entertain the idea of a national policy and begin to identify the players involved.

Galvanizing public will around healthy relationships and relationship education is an important strategy to draw funder attention to the work. Galvanizing public will necessarily requires a "big tent" of players – a diverse coalition of advocacy groups, constituents, professionals, youth, and adults – all invested in relationship education. With such a diverse base of stakeholders, a national conversation about some of the issues discussed over the course of this conference could develop. This conversation could inform a relationship education narrative – a story – for the media and greater public.

NEXT STEPS FOR ACTION: Informing Policymakers, the Media, and the American Public that Relationships Matter

The groups represented at this gathering – practitioners, researchers, funders, and policymakers – generated these next steps for their peers who share their interest in youth development and relationship education. These steps are not an advocacy agenda; rather, they are reflections on how to continue to build the links between the youth development and relationship education fields.

- Develop healthy relationship content that is relevant to vulnerable youth's individual context and update existing relationship education curricula and/or develop resources to reflect modern and realistic relationships and needs.

- Frame relationship education as a pertinent issue for larger communities, such as the education, business, or sexual education community.

- Research relationship attitudes and behaviors among vulnerable youth.

- Identify more avenues by which relationship education can be delivered to large numbers of vulnerable young people.

- Train youth development staff in relationship education.

- Develop a theory of change for relationship education and more effective indicators and measures for evaluation.

- Gather a diverse group of relationship education stakeholders to sell the story to the media and national public.

ABOUT OUR PARTNERS

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States (www.aecf.org). It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of UPS, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother.

The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports, that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs.

national healthy marriage resource center

The **National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC)** is a clearinghouse for high quality, balanced, and timely information and resources on healthy marriage. The NHMRC's mission is to be a first stop for information, resources, and training on healthy marriage for experts, researchers, policymakers, media, marriage educators, couples and individuals, program providers, and others. The NHMRC operates two Web sites, www.HealthyMarriageInfo.org and www.TwoOfUs.org, a Web site designed specifically for individuals and couples that provides direct access to relationship resources.
With support from the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Johnson Foundation, Kohler Foundation, the WinShape Foundation, and others, the NHMRC helps those who want to learn more about healthy relationships, marriage, and marriage education.

INNOVATION CENTER
for community & youth development

The **Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development** connects thinkers and leaders of all ages to develop fresh ideas, forge new partnerships, and design strategies that engage young people and their communities. Its work leads to new practices that strengthen community and youth development and promote social change, and benefits any and all youth-minded organizations – from large foundations to small, community-based groups.
The Innovation Center offers strategic consulting, guiding organizations as they build youth-centered initiatives from the ground up or providing seasoned advice to strengthen ongoing programs, as well as customized trainings. Hallmark resources and an ever-growing and ever-popular catalog of toolkits (available for free download at www.theinnovationcenter.org) provide youth and community development workers with accessible, practical, and hands-on tools to engage young people and affect change in their communities. It specializes in and is committed to, engaging marginalized young people in all manners of youth development and community engagement – especially leadership, civic activism, service-learning, and informal science education.

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The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) is a clearinghouse for high quality, balanced, and timely information and resources on healthy marriage. The NHMRC's mission is to be a first stop for information, resources, and training on healthy marriage for experts, researchers, policymakers, media, marriage educators, couples and individuals, program providers, and others.

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