

# ST. LOUIS HEALTHY MARRIAGE COALITION



# FLAME

FAMILY-LOVE-AND-MARRIAGE-EDUCATION



VOLUME 3, ISSUE 3

SUMMER 2009

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## THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR KICKBALL TOURNAMENT DONORS!

On May 24th 2009 SLHMC joined HopeBUILD to host their first annual Kickball Tournament in Tower Grove Park. We would like to thank all of the local businesses who donated or helped us in this endeavor. First, to the St. Louis Kickball Association for generously donating the equipment for the tournament. Secondly, a major thanks to all the businesses in the South Grand and Tower Grove Heights Neighborhoods who donated raffle prizes, particularly, City Diner, The St. Louis Tea Room, Gelateria Del Leone, and the Missouri Botanical Garden. Also, to Bob Kramer's Marionettes and the Missouri Historical Society for their extremely generous donations. A big thank you to O'Riley's Pub for donating our Grand Prize! Finally a big thanks, to all the participants, we appreciate your support!!

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**MARRIAGE PREP COURSE—IL MONTA-SERO 9:30AM-5:30PM. \$10 REGISTRATION FEE PER COUPLE. FOR MORE INFO CONTACT CAROLINE @ 314-361-2387**

**MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT WORKSHOP — AUGUST 22ND 9:30AM-3PM, AUGUST 23RD 1:30-5PM. SPONSORED BY FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH & HAWK POINT COMMUNITY CHURCH. FOR MORE INFO CONTACT DEBBIE AT 636-528-7322**

**SLHMC 2ND ANNUAL TRIVIA NIGHT— AUGUST 29TH AT THE ENGINEERS CLUB. FOR MORE INFO CONTACT CAROLINE @ 314-361-2387**

## Board of Directors

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**SLHMC's  
2nd Annual Trivia Night**

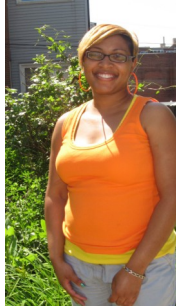
Join us on August 29th for a night of fun and trivia to support the St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition.

**Location:**  
Engineers Club of St. Louis 4359 Lindell  
St. Louis, MO 63108

**Details:**  
August 29th 2009, 7pm. \$160 per team of 8 people.  
Cash Prizes for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Places. Snacks, soda, beer and wine included to participants but you are also welcome to bring your own food and drinks.  
Reservations are recommended and appreciated.  
Please call Caroline at 314-361-2387

## TEEN PREGNANCY AND PREVENTION PARTNERSHIP CONFERENCE

I was very glad I had the opportunity to attend the third annual Teen Pregnancy & Prevention Partnership Conference. There was a comprehensive spin on things during the conference. I initially expected the conference to focus more on pregnancy prevention. In addition to pregnancy prevention, violence against women, sexual health education, and the media's role in sending negative messages about sexuality to teens were all topics discussed. The conference had a very diverse population from nurses and doctors to youth development workers and volunteers.



*Tawanna Gandy, Ameri-corps VISTA volunteer currently serving as the Family and Marriage Coordinator at SLHMC*

The morning keynote speaker, Anne Troy, ignited the passion within me to work in the area of adolescent development. I was reminded that teens today are exposed to negative images of sexuality through media that did not exist years ago. Two major media influences that give misguided information on sexu-

ality are reality television and music. In order for our youth to gain accurate information as it relates to sexuality, educating them and the professionals who work with them is very significant. In addition, parents and other leaders within the community need to be educated. We all need to learn the skills to advocate for programs and services that will promote positive youth development which is needed today as it was in the past.

One of the sessions particularly related to our work at the SLHMC. Teen Advocates for Sexual Health (TASH) performed mini skits on teen dating. Each mini skit had a scenario that dealt with intimate partner abuse. I was reminded how intimate partner abuse among teens is prevalent. Our Connections curriculum teaches teens the skills to recognize the danger signs of abuse and unhealthy relationships. In addition, the curriculum teaches the teens to value who they are as unique individuals. The scenarios performed by TASH reaffirmed how we are on target with providing services that will guide teens in making healthier choices. The conference was great. I learned so many things. I am encouraged to become more educated in adolescent development and generate future ideas for our organization.

Article submitted by Tawanna Gandy

**Plant a Tree for Marriage**

*This spring SLHMC is partnering with Hope-BUILD to make St. Louis a greener city. For the first time, couples who are interested in donating to SLHMC will have the opportunity to have a Missouri Native tree or bush planted in memory of a loved one or to celebrate an anniversary. Prices depend on the type and size of the tree you wish to have planted and all proceeds will benefit those who are served by SLHMC.*



**For more information contact: Caroline at 314-361-2387 or email [slhmc@att.net](mailto:slhmc@att.net)**

## PREP WORKSHOP AT THE MAHATMA GANDHI CENTER

On April 26<sup>th</sup> the SLHMC presented Building Blocks for a Healthy Marriage. Topics included: Respect, Communication, Children, and Finances targeting South Asians which includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. South Asian is a growing and visible minority in U.S. including Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. The Mahatma Gandhi Center was an ideal place to do this type of workshop.

Marriage is a universal institution. The shape of human marriages varies across the world, but the institution itself is a human ideal. The concept of an "arranged marriage" in South Asia has always been a foreign yet fascinating idea to the American public. South Asians are very educated immigrants and achievement oriented. At times they are caught up in the house-car standard of success, without realizing how it affects their relationship. It is surprising to see how much more

thought people put into buying a house than they are willing to put into their relationships. The job situation and the burden of the mortgages can cause stress that affects their relationship.

Different cultures have different styles of sharing responsibility, displaying emotions and values. South Asian women can assume more responsibility in comparison with women from the West, where the culture of sharing responsibility is more equal. With the changing trends, women are more educated, independent, work outside the home and share expenses of the household. Some husbands still want to be the head of the household



*Shalini Sharma with her husband Michael at the Mahatma Gandhi Center*

and continue making decisions financially and socially.

The workshop on Building Blocks for a Healthy Marriage focused on these issues between couples. The workshop was presented by Bridget Brennan, Executive Director of SLHMC, and her husband Jerry Shen. They were a team, bringing male and female perspectives. Jerry Shen being Asian helped to connect and address cultural issues. The couples enjoyed the exercises, the speaker/listener technique, communication styles, and personality typing. Some things they might have considered insignificant before, such as understanding your partner's perspective, became significant after attending the class.

Article submitted by Shalini Sharma SLHMC's Grant Assistant

## THE COHABITATION EFFECT

By: SLHMC Practicum student, Sarah Felde

In today's society pre-marital cohabitation has become very common and even expected, with over 60% of U.S. couples living together before marriage.<sup>1</sup> This high percentage causes many to believe that pre-marital cohabitation is associated with greater marriage quality and fewer divorces. However, this is not the case. Pre-marital cohabitation has consistently been correlated to lower marital satisfaction and a greater probability of divorce in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> The association between pre-marital cohabitation and divorce is so well-established that it is regarded as the "cohabitation effect."<sup>3</sup>



Sarah with her Practicum Supervisor Madeline Adams

There are a number of reasons for the cohabitation effect. Some believe the cohabitation effect is a result of pre-existing characteristics of people that choose to cohabitate.<sup>3</sup> Others suggest that the cohabitation effect is a result of experience, meaning that there is something about cohabitation itself that increases the risk for divorce.<sup>3</sup>

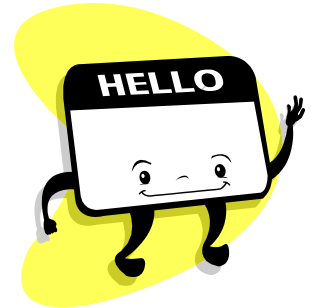
Currently, the ambiguity of relationships

and "relationship inertia" are the newest research aspects of the cohabitation effect. Because cohabitation is quite ambiguous, couples may not be able to develop a common understanding about the nature of their relationships, which increases the probability of divorce.<sup>3</sup> Relationship inertia means that some cohabitating couples could find themselves being less than ideally compatible but ending the relationship would be too difficult so they stay together and marry.<sup>3</sup> Relationship continuance occurs more frequently with cohabitation than with simply dating because of the increased number of constraints, such as a shared lease and financial obligations. In addition, it is suggested that many couples "slide" from non-cohabitation to cohabitation before they fully realize what is happening.<sup>3</sup>

While there are no solutions that fully prevent a couple from experiencing the cohabitation effect, relationship education and marriage-prep workshops can act as protective factors that give couples a greater chance of avoiding the cohabitation effect.

#### References

- <sup>1</sup>Stanley, S. M., Whitton, S. W., & Markman, H. J. (2004). Maybe I do: Interpersonal commitment levels and premarital or non-marital cohabitation. *Journal of Family Issues*, 25, 496-519.  
<sup>2</sup>DeMaris, A., & Rao, V. (1992). Premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability in the United States: A reassessment. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 54, 178-190.  
<sup>3</sup>Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sliding versus deciding: Inertia and the premarital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations*, 55, 499-509.



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## WITHIN OUR REACH TRAINING

I found the Within Our Reach Training very worthwhile. Jennifer Baker, our facilitator, was great. She is very engaging and has an awesome sense of humor. Jennifer is also knowledgeable and passionate about the curriculum. Social service workers from various organizations attended the training which allowed me to network and get to know what types of services those organizations provide within the community. I was glad to see that there are many other agencies that support the growth and health of families. I strongly believe that if families are intact and healthy the community benefits.

I also loved the interactive activities we did during the training. My favorite activity was the 'Personality' activity that helped the trainees to understand their personality types and how those personalities affect relationships. The activity was also a way to help trainees under-

stand their own personalities. After the activity was complete, I had a better understanding of why I



make certain decisions and my own personality.

The activity that challenged me the most was the 'Speaker Listener Technique' activity. Having to actually listen to the person who is speaking without interrupting to try to prove a point is not easy in many cases. In spite of the challenges of the 'Speaker Listener Technique', I saw how it could be of benefit to couples if its steps are practiced on a consistent basis. Overall, the training was great and I look forward to teaching these skills to families.

Article submitted by Tawanna Gandy



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**WE'RE ON THE WEB!**

**WWW.STL-HEALTHYMARRIAGE.ORG**

Promoting & Supporting Healthy Marriage  
in the St. Louis Community

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

This month we celebrate Independence Day in our country. Independence speaks of freedom of autonomy from oppression. This past week, St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition members along with the Healthy Hearts and Homes grant staff participated in a Domestic Violence prevention training presented by the Mo. Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence (MOCADSV). During this training we learned how to respond to Domestic Violence disclosure when both partners are present at an event. Because of the precariousness of such disclosure it is imperative that relationship educators are trained on how to handle such disclosures in a safe manner. The partnership we have with MOCADSV, as well as working with local agencies providing Education and Prevention against Domestic Violence is an effort to reduce and eliminate the oppression of unhealthy and unsafe relationships.

In June we may have set a record for the number of workshops scheduled on one day: On June 27<sup>th</sup> 50 couples attended a Within Our Reach workshop at Abundant Life Church, taught by Linda Bethany.

Another 15 couples attended a Within Our Reach Workshop at Universal Life Church taught by Belinda James and a third workshop, PREP; with 15 couples attending was hosted by Grace Hill taught by Beverly Mann. In July, Francisco Linan, will teach a Family Wellness class in Spanish, Judy Saurage

will teach a parallel, Family Wellness class in English at South Side Day Nursery.

Madeline Adams and volunteer Dan Benoist are currently teaching a Family Wellness class to parents of children attending the Freedom School.

Meanwhile, SLHMC staff, Shalini Sharma, Madeline Adams, Tawanna Gandy and Bridget Brennan are reviewing the ACF Curriculum Guide Assessment to tap into the numerous curricula available. We are excited about the possibilities of expanding our services using these available resources.

May we continue to appreciate and cherish the Freedom that our country provides and endeavor to match that freedom with the personal responsibility that will secure and ensure a healthy future for us and our families.

*~Bridget Brennan*

*Executive Director*

Stronger Marriages, Stronger Families, Stronger Communities.