

# FAMILY STRENGTHENING RESEARCH 2018

OPRE Report #2019-34







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OPRE Report #2019-34 | October 2019

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Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation Administration for Children and Families  
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## ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is responsible for Federal programs that promote the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals, and communities. ACF aims to foster health and well-being by providing federal leadership, partnership, and resources for the compassionate and effective delivery of human services.

ACF programs aim to:

- Empower families and individuals to increase their economic independence and productivity
- Encourage strong, healthy, supportive communities that have a positive impact on quality of life and the development of children
- Create partnerships with front-line service providers, states, localities, and tribal communities to identify and implement solutions that transcend traditional program boundaries
- Improve access to services through planning, reform, and integration
- Address the needs, strengths and abilities of vulnerable populations, including people with developmental disabilities, refugees, and migrants

## OFFICE OF PLANNING, RESEARCH, AND EVALUATION

The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) studies ACF programs and the populations they serve through rigorous research and evaluation projects. These include evaluations of existing programs, evaluations of innovative approaches to helping low-income children and families, research syntheses, and descriptive and exploratory studies. OPRE aims to build and disseminate knowledge about effective approaches to helping low-income children and families. OPRE's research and evaluation projects are conducted primarily through grants and contracts, and include collaboration with ACF programs offices, HHS's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), other Federal entities, and State, Tribal and community partners. OPRE also supports the use of administrative data for research and evaluation and works to improve the quality of data shared between offices and agencies.

OPRE includes four divisions:

- The Division of Economic Independence focuses on welfare, employment, and family self-sufficiency.
- The Division of Child and Family Development focuses on child care, Head Start, Early Head Start, and child abuse and neglect.
- The Division of Family Strengthening focuses on teen pregnancy prevention, youth development, healthy marriage, responsible fatherhood, family violence, runaway and homeless youth, and home visiting.
- The Division of Data and Improvement focuses on improving the quality, usefulness, sharing, and analysis of data on ACF programs.



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# DIVISION OF FAMILY STRENGTHENING: BUILDING EVIDENCE TO STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS

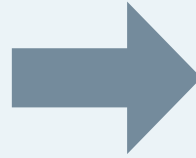
## DFS RESEARCH FOCAL AREAS



Healthy Relationships



Parenting



Transitions to  
Adulthood



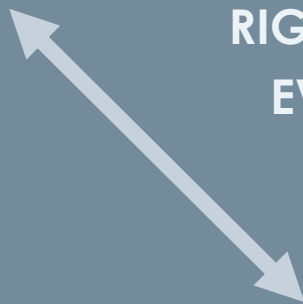
Community  
Connections

Describe programs  
and populations

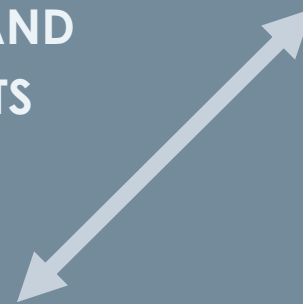


Build evidence to innovate  
and improve programs

## RIGOROUS RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PROJECTS



Translate and build  
capacity



Healthy  
Childhood



Healthy  
Families



## FAMILY STRENGTHENING RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

OPRE's Division of Family Strengthening (DFS)'s mission is to build evidence and evaluation capacity to inform ACF's learning agenda in the program areas of healthy marriage and relationships, transitions to adulthood, parenting, and community connections. DFS has the primary responsibility for research and evaluation related to strengthening relationships, supporting fatherhood, nurturing children through their families, reducing teen pregnancy, supporting positive youth development, and preventing family violence. OPRE's research in the area of family strengthening includes mothers, fathers, couples, families, children, and youth.

### DFS aims to:

- Identify and evaluate ways that ACF programs can strengthen skills, relationships, and collaborations with families, children, individuals, and communities;
- Address the risks for poverty, social isolation, and violence while strengthening relationships within families, between families and providers, and within communities; and
- Make data meaningful for our program partners and the communities they serve.

Within these areas, DFS invests in experimental impact evaluations, process evaluations, and descriptive and theory-building research projects aimed at informing the design and implementation of programs; and measure development to improve our ability to capture outcomes. DFS also invests in building capacity in the research and evaluation field to answer policy-relevant questions.

DFS works in close partnership with a number of other offices, such as:

### In ACF:

- The Office of Family Assistance;
- The Family and Youth Services Bureau;
- The Administration on Native Americans;
- The Children's Bureau; and
- The Office of Child Support Enforcement.

### In HHS:

- The Maternal and Child Health Bureau in the Health Resources and Services Administration; and
- The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

DFS also engages in activities to disseminate rigorous research on family strengthening topics to a diverse range of stakeholders including federal and state policy-makers, program administrators, researchers, and intermediary organizations. DFS has particular strengths in areas related to building evaluation capacity and strengthening research and evaluation with American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

*The following pages describe major OPRE/DFS projects related to family strengthening in Fiscal Year 2018.*



## SUPPORTING FATHERHOOD

In recent decades, efforts to support and promote responsible fatherhood have been spurred by research that shows a link between supportive fathering and positive child outcomes. Responsible fatherhood programs aim to provide resources and supports to fathers around healthy marriage and relationships, parenting, and economic stability. Much of the past research in the area of fatherhood had focused on middle-income fathers or divorced fathers. The field of research on responsible fatherhood with low-income or never married men is growing. Though the field can draw from some of the past research, the unique circumstances of low-income men, particularly non-resident low-income fathers, necessitate a distinct line of inquiry.

In addition to the projects highlighted below, some projects described in the Strengthening Relationships section of this report also include work on fathers, specifically:

- Parents and Children Together Evaluation (PACT)
- Fatherhood and Marriage Local Evaluation (FaMLE) and Cross-Site Project
- Family Strengthening Scholar Grants
- Fatherhood, Relationships, and Marriage – Illuminating the Next Generation of Research (FRAMING)
- Coparenting and Healthy Relationship and Marriage Education for Dads (CHaRMED)

OPRE leads these projects in collaboration with the Office of Family Assistance.

### Building Bridges and Bonds

Building Bridges and Bonds (B3) is a rigorous evaluation study of responsible fatherhood programs designed to answer multiple practice-relevant research questions. B3 is testing three innovative approaches for serving fathers:

- A cognitive behavioral intervention, called *Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Justice Involved Individuals Seeking Employment*, designed to help fathers with criminal records find and retain better jobs.
- A play-based parenting intervention called *Just Beginning* designed to build parenting and co-parenting skills for fathers with children 3 years old or younger.
- A smartphone-based mobile application called *DadTime*, designed to improve fathers' attendance at Just Beginning program sessions and encourage involvement with their child between sessions.

The B3 team is working with six local Responsible Fatherhood programs to implement the interventions and conduct impact and process evaluations. All impact tests will be conducted through random assignment. Study enrollment began in late

2016, and interim reports will be released on an ongoing basis throughout the project.

The *Family Reintegration* project is a sub-study of the B3 project. The purpose of the sub-study is to explore barriers to and opportunities for family reunification during and after parental incarceration, and how Responsible Fatherhood programs can foster family reintegration in their programming. To understand this, the project is reviewing relevant research to date, conducting site visits to programs with reunification services, and in December 2018 held an expert convening on this topic. A literature review and additional products are forthcoming to disseminate project findings and recommendations. The B3 contract was awarded to MDRC.

### Fatherhood Research and Practice Network

The Fatherhood Research and Practice Network is a cooperative agreement that was awarded to Temple University in 2013, with a sub-award to the Center for Policy Research in Denver, CO. The Network has three goals:

- To promote rigorous evaluations of fatherhood programs that serve low-income populations.
- To build evaluation capacity in the field by providing training and technical assistance to researchers and practitioners.
- To disseminate information that leads to more effective fatherhood practice and research.

The Network has awarded 19 sub-awards to researchers or researcher-practitioner teams to conduct research and evaluation of fatherhood programs and populations; developed a number of briefs, papers, conference presentations, and webinars; provided training in program evaluation for fatherhood practitioners; validated new fatherhood measures; and maintained an informative website with recent fatherhood research findings and other researcher and practitioner resources ([www.frpn.org](http://www.frpn.org)).





## Engaging Fathers and Paternal Relatives: A Continuous Quality Improvement Approach in the Child Welfare System

Evidence suggests that positive father involvement can improve a range of well-being outcomes for children. Father involvement is also associated with other important child welfare outcomes, including reduced likelihood of entry into foster care, shorter periods of time in foster care, and increased rates of reunification. Despite the potential for positive impacts of father involvement, engaging fathers and paternal relatives has been a longstanding challenge for child welfare agencies. This project will use a collaborative continuous learning approach to work with child welfare agencies and their system partners to implement strategies and interventions that can be used to improve father and paternal relative engagement. Partnering with the Office of Family Assistance and the Children's Bureau, the project includes the following key tasks: (1) synthesize existing information about engaging fathers and paternal relatives in the child welfare system and continuous learning approaches; (2) map "touch points" within a child welfare case where fathers and/or paternal relatives could be more fully engaged; (3) identify potential strategies and interventions that could be used at the touch points to increase their engagement; (4) implement a collaborative continuous learning approach with a small number of sites to test these father and paternal relative engagement strategies and interventions; and 5) examine the feasibility and implementation of the approach and the engagement strategies and interventions. The contract was awarded to Mathematica Policy Research, with a subcontract to the University of Denver.

## Preventing and Addressing Intimate Violence When Engaging Dads

The purpose of the Preventing and Addressing Intimate Violence When Engaging Dads (PAIVED) project is to learn about intimate partner violence (IPV) experienced and perpetrated by fathers, understand how Responsible Fatherhood programs address IPV in practice, and identify approaches that fatherhood programs could take to address and contribute to the prevention of IPV among fathers.

More specifically, the project will: (1) synthesize information about the prevalence of IPV among fathers; (2) consult with practitioner and research experts in the fatherhood and related fields to identify unique challenges and considerations around addressing IPV in fatherhood programs; (3) examine approaches that fatherhood programs are currently taking to address fathers' experiences with or perpetration of IPV; (4) examine existing curricula and other materials that fatherhood programs use or could use to understand what information is included related to IPV; and (5) identify gaps in currently used approaches and materials, discuss implications for fatherhood programs, and outline approaches that fatherhood programs could take to address and contribute to the prevention of IPV

among fathers. The contract was awarded to Child Trends with subcontracts to Boston Medical Center and Futures Without Violence.

## Trauma-Informed Approaches to Serving Justice-Involved Fathers

The Trauma-Informed Approaches to Serving Justice-Involved Fathers study aims to better understand how a trauma-informed approach can be implemented in Responsible Fatherhood programs that serve fathers who are or were previously incarcerated. This project is a sub-study under the Parents and Children Together (PACT) project. In the fall of 2018, the project published a [literature review](#) about trauma among men, fathers, and justice-involved individuals and current approaches to identifying and addressing trauma in these populations. The project also held a webinar for Responsible Fatherhood program practitioners on trauma among their target populations and how they can incorporate trauma-informed approaches into their programs. A [practitioner-focused brief](#) discussing how practitioners can incorporate trauma-informed approaches into their service provision was published in August 2019. The PACT contract was awarded to Mathematica Policy Research.

## STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS

A large body of research has shown that, on average, children raised in stable, two-parent families have better outcomes on a range of measures, even into adulthood. Research has also identified dimensions of couples' relationship functioning (e.g., positive communication, effective conflict management, problem solving, etc.) that could be modified or enhanced through relationship- focused educational programming. Some evaluations have found that such services can produce improvement in multiple dimensions of relationship quality and reductions in break-up/ divorce.

While past research has focused primarily on middle-class, white couples who were engaged or married, ACF has supported research on healthy marriage and relationship education for more diverse populations. Past ACF research includes the completion of two large scale randomized controlled trials (the Supporting Healthy Marriages and Building Strong Families evaluations) and one quasi-experimental trial of healthy marriage community initiatives (the Community Healthy Marriages Initiatives evaluation).

DFS oversees an ongoing research and evaluation agenda to provide needed information about the implementation and effectiveness of healthy marriage and relationship education services. The agenda includes a focus on learning the views and experiences of participants as well as other key research questions. Below are descriptions of some of the ongoing studies in this portfolio. In addition to the projects highlighted below, work in the Preventing Family Violence and Supporting Fatherhood sections of this report also include work related to strengthening relationships, specifically:

- Building Bridges and Bonds (B3)
- Responding to Intimate Violence in Relationship Programs (RIViR)
- Preventing and Addressing Intimate Violence When Engaging Dads (PAIVED)

OPRE leads these projects in collaboration with the Office of Family Assistance.

### Strengthening Relationship Education and Marriage Services

In order to identify and evaluate strategies for improving the delivery and effectiveness of healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) programs, ACF initiated the Strengthening Relationship Education and Marriage Services (STREAMS) project. STREAMS is a large multi-site random assignment

impact evaluation of HMRE programs serving adults and youth that is designed to answer multiple practice- and policy-relevant questions. STREAMS will feature process and impact studies of 6 programs funded by ACF's Office of Family Assistance that serve adults and youth in high schools. Research questions focus on understanding the effect of HMRE programs for specific populations and the effect of implementation strategies on key outcomes and program engagement. Mathematica Policy Research was awarded the contract for this project, with a subcontract to Public Strategies.

### Parents and Children Together

To learn about the implementation and effects of the second generation of Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRP) programs (funded from 2011-2019), ACF awarded a contract in 2011 to conduct the Parents and Children Together (PACT) evaluation. The evaluation has multiple components, including separate impact and process studies for a select number of responsible fatherhood and healthy marriage programs. It has also conducted a series of three annual in-depth, in-person interviews with selected fathers participating in the responsible fatherhood study programs. The PACT evaluation also has several sub-studies, including a study of the program strategies and adaptations used by selected responsible fatherhood programs serving Hispanic fathers; a study of trauma-informed approaches for serving justice-involved fathers and how responsible fatherhood grantees could implement a trauma-informed approach in their programming; and an assessment of participants' pathways to achieving outcomes. There were two impact reports released in June 2018: 1) the effects of four responsible fatherhood programs for low-income fathers 2) the effects of two healthy marriage programs for low-income couples. This contract is awarded Mathematica Policy Research.





## Key Findings from the PACT Impact Study Reports

- The Responsible Fatherhood (RF) programs in PACT improved fathers' parenting, specifically their self-reported nurturing behavior and engagement in age-appropriate activities with children. However, the programs did not affect the amount of in-person contact fathers had with their children or the financial support they gave them.
- The RF programs in PACT did not affect co-parenting. The fathers in the program and control groups had very similar average scores on the following scales: being a good co-parenting team, co-parenting alliance, using constructive-conflict behaviors, and avoiding destructive conflict behaviors.
- Earnings were similar for the program and control groups, but the RF programs increased the length of time fathers were continuously employed. The effect on employment stability meant that about 1 of every 10 fathers in the program group worked up to one consecutive quarter longer than those in the control group.
- The RF programs in PACT did not affect measures of social-emotional and mental well-being, such as depressive symptoms and belief in whether they could control their life circumstances instead of being controlled by external factors.
- The Healthy Marriage (HM) programs in PACT improved couples' relationship quality, including relationship commitment and support and affection, although they did not improve relationship happiness. There is some evidence that the programs helped couple avoid destructive conflict behaviors, although they did not improve use of constructive conflict behaviors.
- The HM programs in PACT increased the likelihood that couples were married at the one-year follow-up by about 4 percentage points.
- The HM programs in PACT improved couples' co-parenting relationships, as measured by the degree to which couples reported they believed they worked well together in raising their children.
- There is mixed evidence that the HM programs in PACT improved women's earnings during the follow-up period. The programs did not affect men's earnings or their perceptions of economic improvement.

## Fatherhood and Marriage Local Evaluation and Cross-Site Project

The purpose of the Fatherhood and Marriage Local Evaluation and Cross-Site Project is to support high quality performance measure and evaluation data collection, strengthen grantee-led independent local evaluations, and conduct cross-site performance measures analysis for the third cohort (2015-2020) of Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) grantees. The project has updated performance measures for HMRF grantees and has developed a program-specific management information system for these measures called nFORM (Information, Family Outcomes, Reporting, and Management). The project is also supporting more than 30 grantees and their independent evaluators as they conduct grantee-specific impact or descriptive evaluations of their programs. The project will examine how grantees designed and implemented their programs, as well as the reported outcomes for participants in the programs. Taken together, these activities will further ACF's understanding of HMRF programs. The contract was awarded to Mathematica Policy Research.

## Self-Regulation Training Approaches and Resources to Improve Staff Capacity for Implementing Healthy Marriage Programs for Youth

This project will build upon prior research about the important role of self-regulation, and will explore whether a self-regulation framework can be leveraged to improve healthy marriage (HM) programs for youth ages 14-24. Project activities will include identification, development, and formative rapid-cycle evaluation of co-regulation-focused training resources for staff who implement HM programs. The goal of the Self-Regulation Training Approaches and Resources to Improve Staff Capacity for Implementing Healthy Marriage Programs for Youth (SARHM) study is to intentionally enhance staff capacity to promote the self-regulation development of adolescents in relationship education programs.

SARHM includes: (1) a review of literature summarizing a) the current knowledge base around adolescent and young adult self-regulation skill development, (b) co-regulation training, and c) best practices for measurement and assessment of co-regulation and adolescent self-regulation; (2) an exploration of current youth HMRE programs and curricula through the lens of self and co-regulation; and (3) the identification, development, and testing of co-regulation training approaches and resources for staff with an eye toward broad application among curriculum developers, programs, and providers in the future. The contract was awarded to Public Strategies, in partnership with Mathematica Policy Research and Dr. Desiree Murray.





## Fatherhood, Relationships, and Marriage – Illuminating the Next Generation of Research

The Fatherhood, Relationships, and Marriage – Illuminating the Next Generation of Research (FRAMING Research) project supports activities relevant to a learning agenda for the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) program, which is administered by ACF's Office of Family Assistance (OFA). This project examines research and evaluation related to HMRF programming. Through expert consultation, knowledge mapping, and an iterative literature review, it explores completed and ongoing HMRF research to identify gaps and inform future research relevant to HMRF programs. The FRAMING Research project also considers closely related fields and their implications for HMRF programming such as implementation science. The contract was awarded to Mathematica Policy Research.

## Coparenting and Healthy Relationship and Marriage Education for Dads

Coparenting and Healthy Relationship and Marriage Education for Dads (CHaRMED) is a federal evaluation effort designed to: better understand how Responsible Fatherhood (RF) programs currently support healthy marriages/relationships and coparenting; examine how their approaches align with the needs of the fathers in their target populations; and inform the RF field about potential future directions in Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education (HMRE) and coparenting programming. In two parallel and related sets of activities (one set focused on HMRE and one on coparenting), information collected under CHaRMED will focus on the nature of fathers' relationships, review the services that RF programs currently provide to support healthy marriages/relationships and coparenting, solicit fathers' opinions about those services, identify gaps in services, and outline recommendations for addressing these gaps. The contract was awarded to Child Trends.

## The Marriage Strengthening Research and Dissemination Center

The Marriage Strengthening Research and Dissemination Center (MASTRD) is a five-year cooperative agreement, awarded to Child Trends, designed to form a nexus between basic and applied research and evaluation on marriage and families in the United States and programmatic approaches to supporting healthy marriages and families. The Center will: 1) contribute to the research and evaluation base relevant to marriage and relationships (including current and future relationships among youth) and Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education (HMRE) programs and practices; 2) build and support capacity for demographic trends and practice-focused research and

evaluation; and 3) translate and disseminate emerging research and evaluation. The Center is expected to have a primary focus on economically disadvantaged populations and other understudied population groups. The Center also is expected to actively engage a diverse range of stakeholders, including, but not limited to, investigators, researchers, evaluators, practitioners, program officials, and policymakers throughout the course of the project.

## Family Strengthening Scholar Grants

The Family Strengthening Scholars grant program is designed to build research capacity in the healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood field (HMRF). These grants are to support dissertation research on HMRF policy issues and are meant to build capacity in the research field to focus research on questions that have direct implications for HMRF decision-making and program administration. They are intended to focus particularly on underserved/understudied populations, such as low-income families and minority populations, utilize rigorous methodology, and help inform the development of future intervention research.

## Spotlight on Capacity Building

Throughout its research and evaluation portfolio, OPRE has a strong focus on building capacity of the field. This includes supporting new scholars to conduct applied, policy-relevant research as well as building the capacity of the policy and practice community to understand research and evaluation. Below are some highlights from these kinds of activities.

**The Design Options for Home Visiting Evaluation (DOHVE) project** provides support that promotes excellence in performance measurement, continuous quality improvement, and grantee-led evaluations of home visiting programs in the states and territories. The project provides universal support through briefs and webinars and individualized support to grantees in states and territories. The DOHVE team works to: 1) build grantee capacity in data and evaluation activities; 2) support grantees in disseminating findings; and 3) synthesize the activities supported under this contract. To access DOHVE TA resources, see <https://www.jbassoc.com/project/design-options-home-visiting-evaluation-dohve/>.

**The Tribal Evaluation Institute (TEI)** provides technical assistance, leadership, and support to promote excellence in community-based research and evaluation of Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) initiatives that serve American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) children and families through the Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program. Example focal areas of technical assistance to grantees include: developing and implementing a rigorous evaluation of home visiting; selecting, adapting, and developing culturally appropriate data collection tools and measures; tracking and measuring performance; developing and modifying existing data systems; continuous quality improvement; data protection and privacy; and ethical dissemination and translation of evaluation findings derived from research with AIAN to external audiences. To access TEI TA resources, see [www.tribaleval.org](http://www.tribaleval.org).

**The Fatherhood and Marriage Local Evaluation and Cross-Site project** supports high quality performance measure and evaluation data collection, strengthens grantee-led independent local evaluations, and conducts cross-site performance measures analysis for the third cohort (2015-2020) of Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) grantees.

Both the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network (<https://www.frpn.org/>) and the Center for Research on Hispanic Children and Families (<http://www.hispanicresearchcenter.org/>) have as one of their primary goals to develop capacity within the research, evaluation, and practitioner communities to conduct and participate in high-quality evaluation studies. This goal may be accomplished through post-doctoral or research fellowship opportunities or supporting new investigator work.

## HOME VISITING: NURTURING CHILDREN THROUGH FAMILIES

Home visiting is a service delivery strategy that aims to support the healthy development and well-being of children and families by providing individually tailored support, resources, and information. In the work described below, home visiting is used to provide services to pregnant women and families with children up to age five. Early childhood home visiting programs affect a range of outcomes including maternal health, child health and development, child maltreatment prevention, and family economic self-sufficiency. The federal investment in home visiting – and related research and evaluation – has greatly expanded through the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, which was established in 2010.

OPRE leads these projects in collaboration with HHS's Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

### Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation

The Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation (MIHOPE) is the legislatively mandated evaluation of the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program. MIHOPE was launched in 2011 and has four main components: 1) an analysis of the needs assessments that the states and territories provided in their initial MIECHV applications; 2) an impact analysis; 3) an implementation analysis; and 4) a cost analysis. The evaluation includes 12 states, 88 local sites, and approximately 4,200 families. Families were randomly assigned to a group offered home visiting services or to a group provided with information on other services available in the community. Sites in the evaluation operate one of four models: Early Head Start – Home-based option (EHS), Healthy Families America (HFA), Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), and Parents as Teachers (PAT). A report to Congress that included the needs assessment analysis and baseline characteristics about families and programs was submitted in 2015. The report on findings from the implementation research was released in November 2018, and the report on impact findings was released in January 2019. A cost analysis report will be released in 2020. The contract was awarded to MDRC with subcontracts to James Bell Associates, Johns Hopkins University, Mathematica Policy Research, University of Georgia, and a number of academic consultants.

### Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation – Check In

Previous research has found that home visiting programs can have long-term effects on child and family outcomes. The

Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation (MIHOPE) is examining child and family outcomes when the children are 15 months old. To ensure that it is possible to examine the long-term impacts of the MIECHV program with future follow-up studies, up-to-date contact information must be maintained for study participants. The purpose of the MIHOPE Check-In project is to regularly update contact information for families that participated in MIHOPE. In addition, the MIHOPE Check-In project is administering brief surveys to gather information on a small set of family and child outcomes. Data is currently being collected when the children are 2.5 and 3.5 years of age. The contract was awarded to MDRC with subcontracts to, Mathematica Policy Research, University of Georgia.

### MIHOPE Long-Term Follow-up

The purpose of the MIHOPE Long-Term Follow-Up project (MIHOPE-LT) is to design and conduct follow-up studies that will examine the long-term effects, including cost benefits, of the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program. MIHOPE is examining child and family outcomes for participants in the MIECHV program when the children are 15 months old. Given that previous research on home visiting programs has found impacts on child and family outcomes when the children are even older (i.e. pre-school age, school age, teenagers, etc.), MIHOPE-LT will examine such outcomes in the MIHOPE sample. The project will 1) produce a design that takes into account how to best build on existing projects that involve the MIHOPE sample and how to most efficiently and effectively examine the long-term outcomes and cost benefits of the MIECHV program, 2) collect and analyze data to examine these outcomes, and 3) produce reports and other products to share results. A brief summarizing prior research findings on the long-term effects of home visiting was released in October 2017. Data collection when the children participating in MIHOPE are in Kindergarten began in January 2019. The contract was awarded to MDRC with subcontracts to, Mathematica Policy Research, University of Georgia.





## Key Findings from the MIHOPE Impact Study

- **There are positive effects of home visiting programs that participated in MIHOPE**, and they are generally similar to but somewhat smaller than the average effects found in past studies. Of 12 outcomes the study focused on, 4 had estimated effects that are statistically significant. No outcome area stands out as one where home visiting programs had large effects.
- **Differences in effects among the evidence-based home visiting models are generally consistent with the models' focuses.** For example, Parents as Teachers produced the largest increase in parental supportiveness and Nurse-Family Partnership produced the largest reduction in emergency department visits for children, although the differences are sensitive to the statistical methods used.
- **Effects on family outcomes do not vary much by family characteristics**, suggesting that home visiting is not having larger effects for different types of families. The effects may vary in ways that were not examined in this report.
- **Effects were generally consistent across local programs.** In addition, differences in the way programs were implemented were not associated with differences in effects, and families who received more home visits did not benefit more than other families. In short, local programs were equally effective across different settings and with different implementation features.



## Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation – Strong Start

The Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation-Strong Start (MIHOPE-Strong Start) evaluated the effectiveness of home visiting for improving birth and health outcomes for expectant families enrolled in Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). The study included programs implementing one of the two evidence-based models that had some prior evidence of effectiveness for improving birth outcomes: Healthy Families America (HFA) and Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP). The evaluation is part of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services’ (CMS) Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation’s [Strong Start for Mothers and Newborns](#) initiative.

MIHOPE-Strong Start included a randomized control impact analysis and a multi-level implementation analysis. The evaluation included 17 states, 66 local sites, and 2,900 families. Families were randomly assigned to a group offered home visiting services or to a group offered information on other services in the community. The study included local sites that were receiving some Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood

Home Visiting (MIECHV) program funding as well as those with only non-MIECHV funding sources. The study is complete. The design report (2015) and three annual reports have been released. The [first annual report \(2014\)](#) includes a description of the MIHOPE-Strong Start study and outlines the similarities and differences between the HFA and NFP. The [second annual report \(2015\)](#) details the MIHOPE-Strong Start team’s experiences with the process and challenges of gaining access to state Medicaid and vital records administrative data. The [third annual report \(2016\)](#), presents an early examination of the baseline characteristics of families and local home visiting programs in MIHOPE-Strong Start. The [final report](#) that includes implementation and impact findings was released in January 2019. The contract to conduct the evaluation was awarded to MDRC with subcontracts to James Bell Associates, Johns Hopkins University, Mathematica Policy Research, and New York University.

### Key Findings from the MIHOPE – Strong Start Implementation and Impact Findings

- **Families who received at least one home visit (86 percent of the program group) had an average of eight visits over four months before the woman gave birth.** Families received a similar amount of home visiting as found in prior studies, including those that found reductions in the percentage of infants born preterm or with low birth weights.
- **Women who were more and less vulnerable to poor birth outcomes received similar levels of home visiting services.** Among women who received at least one home visit, those who exhibited risks for compromised birth outcomes (such as being of a younger age or being a smoker) received the same number of visits and participated for similar lengths of time, on average, as women who didn’t demonstrate such risks.
- **The home visiting programs in the study had no statistically significant effect on the evaluation’s focal outcomes, including families’ prenatal behaviors, birth outcomes, or health care use in the first year after birth.** The estimated differences found in the study’s main outcomes, such as low birth weight and preterm birth, are small, and they are not statistically significant.
- **Effects of the home visiting programs in the study are not greater for higher-risk or for lower-risk families or depending on how the programs were implemented.** Home visiting did not have larger effects on prenatal behaviors, birth outcomes, or health care use after birth for any subgroups of families, nor do the effects vary across local programs or by evidence-based model.

## Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness

In 2010 as part of implementing the MIECHV legislation, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) set criteria for determining which home visiting program models have evidence of effectiveness. The Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness (HomVEE) project is an annual, systematic review of evidence of effectiveness, the results of which determine which models meet the HHS criteria. As of 2018, 20 of 46 models reviewed have been found to meet the criteria. In addition, HomVEE reviews the evidence for home visiting programs in tribal communities and implementation lessons learned. This contract was awarded to Mathematica Policy Research.

## Design Options for Home Visiting Evaluation

The Design Options for Home Visiting Evaluation provides support that promotes excellence in performance measurement, continuous quality improvement, and grantees' evaluations of home visiting programs in the states and territories. A second purpose of the DOHVE contract is to synthesize available data and key lessons around these activities. The DOHVE team works to 1) build grantee capacity in data and evaluation activities; 2) support grantees in disseminating findings; and 3) synthesize the activities supported under this contract. The DOHVE contract was awarded to James Bell Associates.

## Tribal Home Visiting Evaluation Institute

The Tribal Evaluation Institute (TEI) provides technical assistance, leadership, and support to promote excellence in community-based research and evaluation of Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) initiatives that serve American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children and families through the Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program. Example focal areas of technical assistance to grantees include: developing and implementing a rigorous evaluation of home visiting; selecting, adapting, and developing culturally appropriate data collection tools and measures; tracking and measuring benchmarks; developing and modifying existing data systems; continuous quality improvement; data protection and privacy; and ethical dissemination and translation of evaluation findings derived from research with AI/AN to external audiences. TEI was awarded to James Bell Associates, and subcontractors Michigan Public Health Institute, University of Colorado Denver, Tellinger Inc., and Face to Face Integrated Technologies.

To access all TEI resources, see [www.tribaleval.org](http://www.tribaleval.org).

## Multi-Site Implementation Evaluation of Tribal Home Visiting

The Multi-Site Implementation Evaluation of Tribal Home Visiting (MUSE) will systematically explore home visiting implementation across the Tribal MIECHV initiative. The MUSE Team of James Bell Associates, Inc. (JBA) and Centers for American Indian and Alaska Native Health (CAIANH) at the University of Colorado Anschutz

Medical Campus is engaging tribal grantees, tribal and organizational leadership, and evaluation consultants to create an innovative yet feasible multi-site implementation evaluation of Tribal MIECHV. The MUSE Team has integrated multiple theoretical and practice-based approaches to increase study relevance and rigor, capitalize on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative designs, and enhance our ability to conduct a study that is responsive to stakeholders.

The MUSE conceptual model and priority evaluation questions build on the Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation (MIHOPE) conceptual model for implementation and have been refined in partnership with stakeholders. This adaptation of the MIHOPE model highlights unique cultural and contextual inputs, outputs, and outcomes, and communicates that context is critical rather than peripheral.

## Tribal Early Childhood Research Center

The Tribal Early Childhood Research Center (TRC) seeks to address gaps in early childhood research with American Indian and Alaska Natives through partnerships with Tribal Head Start, Early Head Start, child care, and home visiting programs. The goals of the re-search are 1) to identify needs and/or develop effective practices for early childhood initiatives in tribal communities; and 2) to identify, validate, and/or develop culturally meaningful measures of program practices and outcomes for AIAN families. A third goal is to establish peer-learning communities and provide training and professional development to facilitate interest and competencies in research relevant to early childhood initiatives in tribal communities. The TRC is engaged in pilot research with AIAN communities and secondary analyses of existing data on AIAN children and families. The grant award is to University of Colorado Denver.

Links to TRC activities and the resources they have developed can be found at [www.tribalearlychildhood.org](http://www.tribalearlychildhood.org).



## The Assessment and Mapping of Community Connections in Home Visiting

The Assessment and Mapping of Community Connections in Home Visiting (AMC-HV) project is identifying and applying innovative methods to better understand the community-level systems and networks in which the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program operates, including the availability of community service providers that home visiting programs can refer families to, and the relationships between home visiting programs and community resources. Specifically, the project is examining relevant approaches for analyzing community networks in home visiting, early care and education, and related health and human services fields. These approaches include social network analysis, geomapping, and/or other appropriate, state-of-the-art methods to understand community connections. In addition, AMC-HV is building on existing efforts to synthesize and apply information gathered about these approaches to create a dynamic method of understanding community connections in home visiting. The contract was awarded to Child Trends, with a subcontract to Trilogy Interactive.

## Touchpoints for Addressing Substance Use Issues in Home Visiting

The goal of the Touchpoints for Addressing Substance Use Issues in Home Visiting project is to generate knowledge about how home visiting programs, including those funded through HRSA's and ACF's Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, engage and support families around prevention, treatment, and recovery from substance use issues. The project will identify evidence-informed practices for working with families, supporting frontline staff, and building collaborations with referral sources. The project will also identify gaps in knowledge on preventing or addressing substance use issues within the context of home visiting.

The project includes the development of an overarching conceptual model and a series of detailed models that reflect the pathways (i.e., touchpoints) through which home visiting programs can address substance use issues among families. To inform the models, the team will review relevant documentation and literature and engage stakeholders and expert consultants from home visiting, child welfare, substance use, mental health, and public health fields. In addition the project will develop design options for a range of studies that have the potential to inform a research agenda related to addressing substance use issues in the context of home visiting programs. The project will produce reports, practitioner-friendly briefs, and other actionable resources to provide information for State, Territory, and Tribal MIECHV grantees and home visiting programs working to prevent, identify, and treat substance use issues and serve families dealing with substance use issues. The contract was awarded to Mathematica with subcontracts to Northwestern University and Institute for Health and Recovery.

## Family Level Assessment and State of Home Visiting

The Family Level Assessment and State of Home Visiting (FLASH-V) project was initiated to increase understanding of how families are selected to receive home visiting services through the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV). This project is intended to employ a variety of strategies in order to examine the currently available literature on how family risk factors influence home visiting effectiveness, as well as gather descriptive information about current decision making processes that influence which families receive or do not receive home visiting services.

The project includes a literature review and scan of the field that examines family level factors that may influence the impact of home visiting services and explores currently available training and technical assistance materials that home visiting programs may be using for decision making. The project also includes an examination of the decision making practices about program enrollment currently employed in the field of home visiting. An optional service component will examine additional information relevant to referrals and family service enrollment.

Research questions include:

- What are the decision-making processes that influence which families receive or are excluded from home visiting services at the national model, state, county, local program, and employee level?
- What is the evidence base behind the prioritization processes in the field?
- Are risk screening procedures being used for decision making?
- What specific screening tools are used to guide decision making?

The contract was awarded to James Bell Associates with a subcontract to MDRC.

## Home Visiting Career Trajectories

The goal of the Home Visiting Career Trajectories (HVCT) project is to examine the state of home visiting careers to understand how people enter the field, the perceived and actual pathways for professional advancement and tenure, and reasons for field attrition. There is little data in the field for the home visiting workforce that can be used to know how to best recruit and retain high quality staff, so this work aims to address some of the needs in the field for data in this area. The project has two purposes. First, it will provide information on the state of the home visiting sector and the career trajectories of home visitors and recommendations on strategies to build a pipeline of high-quality home visitors and supervisors. Second, it will provide information on the professional development system that supports early childhood home visiting, including training and technical assistance supports. To accomplish these goals, the research team will access pre-existing administrative and survey data and collect new data. The contract was awarded to Urban Institute.



## Spotlight on Family Strengthening Research for American Indians and Alaskan Natives

Across OPRE, there is a growing portfolio of research on ACF programs and their role in serving American Indians and Alaska Natives. From Head Start and Home Visiting to Child Welfare and TANF, OPRE's research reflects ACF's commitment to developing and undertaking research in a manner that reflects the strengths, needs, and cultural identities of American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Currently, the Division of Family Strengthening has several ongoing research and capacity building efforts specifically focused on American Indians and Alaska Natives.

### Tribal TANF-Child Welfare Coordination Data Capacity Building

The Tribal TANF-Child Welfare Coordination Data Capacity Building contract provides technical assistance and support to [Tribal TANF Child Welfare Coordination Grantees](#) that promotes excellence in performance measurement, continuous quality improvement, and grantee-led collaborations between child welfare and TANF agencies in their tribal communities. The project is intended to 1) provide technical assistance to grantees in revising project logic models to align project activities with intended outcomes; 2) provide support for grantees' identification and collection of performance measures to track project activities and outcomes; 3) provide support to grantees in using data for quality assurance and continuous quality improvement; 4) provide programmatic guidance on ways to strengthen Tribal TANF and Child Welfare coordination in order to strengthen outcomes specified by grantees in their applications; and 5) document these activities and lessons learned. This project provides universal guidance and peer learning opportunities, as well as grantee specific guidance on a variety of topics including identification of measurable goals and objectives, data systems and data privacy, data analysis and interpretation, continuous quality improvement, and dissemination of program successes. This contract was awarded to James Bell Associates.

### Tribal Home Visiting Evaluation Institute

The Tribal Home Visiting Evaluation Institute (TEI) provides technical assistance, leadership, and support to promote excellence in community-based research and evaluation of Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) initiatives that serve American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children and families through the Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program. Example focal areas of technical assistance to grantees include: developing and implementing a rigorous evaluation of home visiting; selecting, adapting, and developing culturally appropriate data collection tools and measures; tracking and measuring benchmarks; developing and modifying existing data systems; continuous quality improvement; data protection and privacy; and ethical dissemination and translation of evaluation findings derived from research with AI/AN to external audiences. A website that makes TEI technical assistance resources available to a broader audience of tribal program staff, community members, and professionals who partner with tribal communities is available at: <http://www.tribaleval.org/>. This contract was awarded to James Bell Associates, and subcontractors Michigan Public Health Institute, University of Colorado Denver, Tellenger Inc., and Face to Face Integrated Technologies.

### Multi-Site Implementation Evaluation of Tribal Home Visiting

The Multi-Site Implementation Evaluation of Tribal Home Visiting (MUSE) will systematically explore home visiting implementation across the Tribal MIECHV initiative. The MUSE Team of James Bell Associates, Inc. (JBA) and Centers for American Indian and Alaska Native Health (CAIANH) at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus is engaging tribal grantees, tribal and organizational leadership, and evaluation consultants to create an innovative yet feasible multi-site implementation evaluation of Tribal MIECHV. The MUSE Team has integrated multiple theoretical and practice-based approaches to increase study relevance and rigor, capitalize on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative designs, and enhance our ability to conduct a study that is responsive to stakeholders.



# SUPPORTING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSITIONS TO ADULthood

Many ACF programs serve youth. Some directly target youth, such as the Personal Responsibility Education Program (which provides abstinence and contraceptive education to young people) or the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. In some cases youth are participants in broader ACF programs. The Division of Family Strengthening has a number of projects with a sole or large focus on youth. In addition to the projects below, some home visiting evaluation projects, including MIHOPE and MIHOPE-Strong Start projects that are included in the Nurturing Children Through Families section of this report, will include a significant proportion of young mothers in their study samples.

Other OPRE Divisions conduct youth-focused research as well. The Division of Economic Independence has projects focused on youth employment and training. The Division of Child and Family Development undertakes projects on youth in child welfare and foster care populations, and human trafficking.

Across OPRE, we use rigorous research and evaluation to describe, evaluate, and translate a range of existing, innovative, and effective ways to serve youth, in six core areas.



**YOUTH TRANSITIONS  
TO ADULthood**



**TEEN ROMANTIC  
RELATIONSHIPS**



**TRANSITIONS FROM  
FOSTER CARE**

## IMPROVING HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILIES

## IMPROVING SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND OTHER WELL-BEING OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILIES



**SEXUAL RISK  
AVOIDANCE &  
PREGNANCY  
PREVENTION**



**RUNAWAY &  
HOMELESS YOUTH &  
HUMAN TRAFFICKING**



**EMPLOYMENT AND  
SELF-SUFFICIENCY**

*The following projects are overseen by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in collaboration with the Family and Youth Services Bureau:*

## Personal Responsibility Education Program Multi- Component Evaluation

The Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) is one of multiple efforts at the Federal level to reduce teen pregnancy through the use of evidence-based programs. The goals of the PREP Multi-Component Evaluation are to document how programs funded through the State PREP program are implemented in the field and to assess selected PREP-funded programs' effectiveness. The study will 1) describe how States have designed and implemented PREP programs, 2) collect and analyze performance measurement data, and 3) conduct random assignment impact evaluations and in depth implementation evaluations in four specific PREP-funded sites. The contract was awarded to Mathematica Policy Research.

## Personal Responsibility Education Program: Promising Youth Programs

For the second generation of Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) programming (2016-2020), the Promising Youth Programs (PYP) project supports PREP grantees through two activities: 1) it supports grantee-led evaluations by providing training and technical assistance; and 2) it is developing new, or revising existing, curricula to address the abstinence and contraceptive (and other PREP-related) needs of youth for whom there is little targeted programming. This contract is awarded to Mathematica Policy Research.

## PREP Studies of Performance Measures and Adult Preparation Subjects

The Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) Studies of Performance Measures and Adult Preparation Subjects (PMAPS) serves multiple purposes – to revise measures to monitor and re- port grantee performance and analysis of performance data; to collect, analyze, and report performance data; and, to develop adult preparation subjects (APS) conceptual models. PMAPS is comprised of two key components, one on performance measures and one on adult preparation subjects.

The PREP Performance Measures Study aims to support PREP-funded programs in developing, collecting, and reporting on meaningful performance measures that communicate the PREP programs' mission and priorities, to analyze data from those measures to determine if grantees and the PREP program overall are meeting performance benchmarks, and to provide

information to grantees about their performance. The PREP Adult Preparation Subjects (APS) Conceptual Models Study aims to conduct a review of PREP grantees' APS programming, and to develop conceptual models that demonstrate how inclusion of APS can enhance or expand on the outcomes for youth participating in PREP programs. The contract was awarded to Mathematica Policy Research.

## Sexual Risk Avoidance Education National Evaluation

The Sexual Risk Avoidance Education National Evaluation (SRAENE) is designed to address congressionally-mandated Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) research and evaluation objectives. It comprises three distinct projects. First, a National Descriptive Study will provide a nationwide description of how grantees and provider organizations implement SRAE programs, the outcomes for youth in these programs, and associations between program implementation and outcomes. Second, a Program Components Impacts Study will implement innovative evaluation designs in order to assess the effectiveness of SRAE program components. Third, the project will provide data and evaluation support to grantees, to build grantee data capacity and support grantee-led evaluations. The contract was awarded to Mathematica Policy Research.

## Transitional Living Program Evaluation Studies

The 2003 Reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act called for a study of long-term outcomes for youth who are served through the Transitional Living Program (TLP). In response, OPRE and ACF's Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) are sponsoring a study that will capture data from youth at program entry and up to 12 months after program entry and will assess long-term outcomes related to housing, education and employment, social and emotional well-being, and permanent connections.

OPRE and FYSB are also sponsoring a process evaluation of the 2016 Transitional Living Program Special Population Demonstration Project. This FYSB grant program targets LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness who are between the ages of 16 to 21, as well as young adults who have left foster care after the age of 18 up to age 21, but who may still need housing and services. The process evaluation will assess grantees' implementation of the demonstration project, which seeks to support promising strategies for helping homeless youth transition to self-sufficient adults. Grantees may serve either or both of the project's target populations based on an assessment of their community's needs. The contract was awarded to Abt Associates.

*The following projects are overseen by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in Collaboration with the Family and Youth Services Bureau and HHS's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health.*

### Model on Risk Avoidance Theory and Research In- forming an Optimal Health Model

The purpose of this project is to develop a conceptual model to understand the pathways to sexual risk avoidance for prevention of teen pregnancy. The research team will consider relevant theories and explore existing conceptual models and public health messaging that prioritizes optimal health, both within the field of sexual risk avoidance and outside of it. Two primary activities will inform the conceptual model development: 1) the research team will conduct a comprehensive and structured literature review of the theoretical foundation of sexual risk avoidance and the evidence on the effectiveness of program approaches, including public health messaging related to sexual and other risk behaviors; and 2) there will be input from a set of experts on teen development and risk-taking behavior. The final product will be a conceptual model for use within the sex education field that is potentially adaptable to other youth risk behaviors. The contract was awarded to Mathematica Policy Research.

### Model Empowering Youth to Resume Abstinence and Seek Optimal Health Now

The purpose of this project is to develop conceptual and program models to assist sexually-experienced youth in avoiding sexual risk for the prevention of teen pregnancy and other risks related to teen sex. For the conceptual model, the research team will identify risk and protective factors associated with sexual risk cessation; the knowledge, skills, and behaviors associated with sex cessation among youth; short- and long-term outcomes associated with sexual risk cessation; and key measurement constructs. Two primary activities will inform conceptual model development: (1) a comprehensive and structured literature review of the theoretical foundation of sexual risk cessation and the evidence on the effectiveness of program approaches, including public health messaging related to sexual and other risk behaviors; and (2) input from a set of experts on teen development and risk-taking behavior. For the program model, the research team will consider the conceptual model work in order to identify, adapt, and develop a sexual risk cessation program model for teen pregnancy prevention. The program model will focus on hypothesized mechanisms of action for addressing risk and protective factors for youth abstinence, and for changing knowledge, skills, and behaviors to improve short- and long-term outcomes. Afterwards, the team will adapt existing programs per the features of the hypothesized program model. This task will set the stage for future implementation evaluation of adapted programs, informing both the field and the public health community about the model. The contract was awarded to Mathematica Policy Research.





## Savings from Sexual Avoidance and Empowerment over Risks

The Savings from Sexual Avoidance and Empowerment over Risks (SSAvER) project consists of two studies focused on economic savings. Both studies will engage key stakeholders to identify targeted research questions, operationalize core variables, and identify best practices in economic analysis.

The purpose of the first study is to identify the economic savings associated with delay of sexual initiation among adolescents. Prior work that assessed costs associated with teen pregnancy and births will be considered, including the identification of outcomes associated with delayed sexual initiation, calculation of causal effects of sexual delay on outcomes, and assignment of dollar values to causal effects. This study will also examine costs and benefits beyond the physical consequences of teen childbearing and acquisition of STDs. The purpose of the second study is to identify the economic savings associated with adhering to the success sequence. The success sequence refers to a series of life milestones as a means to adult self-sufficiency and well-being. While definitions of the milestones differ, they typically include achieving at least a high school education, finding and maintaining a job, and getting married before having children. Existing research will be considered, including definitions of and outcomes associated with each milestone, calculation of causal effects of each milestone on outcomes, and assignment of dollar values to causal effects. The primary activities that will inform the economic savings analysis for each study includes: 1) targeted literature review, 2) discussions with experts, and 3) limited analysis of existing data sets. The contract was awarded to Mathematica Policy Research.

## Youth Empowerment Information, Data Collection, and Exploration on Avoidance of Sex

The goal of the Youth Empowerment Information, Data Collection, and Exploration on Avoidance of Sex project is to collect data that will inform educational topics and strategies for an optimal-health sexual risk avoidance (SRA) approach to reducing teen pregnancy and improving youth well-being. The project will identify strategies, skills, messages, and themes that are most likely to resonate with youth. The project will inform hypotheses on how to increase the effectiveness of sex education approaches so that more youth avoid the risks associated with teen sex, and teen pregnancy rates are reduced. A number of data collection activities will be conducted with youth and parents to understand teen pregnancy prevention issues and identify key mechanisms of action for program models: 1) national surveys; 2) focus groups; and 3) other data collection (e.g., case studies and secondary data analysis). The contract was awarded to Mathematica Policy Research.



## PREVENTING FAMILY VIOLENCE

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a significant problem for women and men in the United States, with 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men experiencing severe physical violence by an intimate partner in his or her lifetime. Furthermore, the prevalence of IPV is higher among low-income populations and populations of color (specifically African American, American Indian, Alaska Native and multiracial persons). The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) is the primary federal funding stream dedicated to the support of emergency shelter and related assistance for victims of domestic violence and their children. ACF's Family Violence Prevention and Services Division oversees FVPSA-funded programming, and DFS conducts IPV research in close collaboration with this division.

In addition to the projects highlighted below, projects in the Supporting Fatherhood, Nurturing Children Through Families, and Strengthening Relationships sections also include work relevant to IPV, specifically:

- Parents and Children Together Evaluation (PACT);
- Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation;
- Preventing and Addressing Intimate Violence When Engaging Dads

### Responding to Intimate Violence in Relationship Programs

The purpose of the Responding to Intimate Violence in Relationship Programs (RIViR) project is to understand how to best identify and address intimate partner violence (IPV) and teen dating violence (TDV) in the context of healthy marriage and relationship education (i.e., healthy relationship) programming. The specific aims of RIViR are 1) to describe IPV and TDV prevalence and experiences among healthy relationship program participants; 2) to summarize existing healthy relationship programs' approaches to addressing IPV and TDV; 3) to synthesize evidence for understanding how healthy relationship programs may influence IPV and TDV; 4) to summarize existing evidence on recognizing and addressing IPV and TDV in healthy relationship programs; and 5) to assess whether different approaches to screening for IPV and TDV reliably identify IPV and TDV experiences in order to provide appropriate assistance for survivors.

To accomplish these goals, the project has focused on research evidence and supplemented this information with expert input where evidence is lacking, so that technical assistance providers and practitioners can understand the current knowledge base as they develop specific guidance and program approaches. To address the final aim, the project will test approaches to

screening for IPV and TDV in healthy relationship programs to determine whether providing closed-ended and open-ended opportunities for disclosure can reliably identify IPV and TDV. The contract was awarded to RTI International.

### Accomplishments of the Domestic Violence Hotline, On-line Connections, and Text

The National Domestic Violence Hotline (The Hotline) and loveisrespect, the help line targeted towards young people, provide crisis intervention and support services; information about re- sources on domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and other forms of violence; and nationwide referrals and direct connections to domestic violence shelters and programs. Funded by the Division of Family Violence Prevention and Services within the Family and Youth Services Bureau, they serve as critical partners in the intervention, prevention, and resource assistance efforts of the network of family violence, domestic violence, and dating violence service providers. The purpose of this contract is to describe the activities and outcomes of the Hotline and loveisrespect and to develop ways to collect information on their activities and performance on an ongoing basis. To accomplish these goals, the research team has analyzed existing anonymous data collected by the hotlines, as well as new anonymous data collected for the purpose of this project. This includes information on the services and resources provided, the needs and requests of those who contact them, the helpfulness of information and assistance provided, and the trends and patterns and preferences for various modes of service (phone, online chat, text messaging, and websites). Findings from this first phase of the project are described in this report. In its second phase, the project is following up with those who contact The Hotline and LIR to understand their outcomes in the short term, using methods that prioritize their safety, privacy and confidentiality. The contract was awarded to the Milken Institute School of Public Health at The George Washington University.

## National Domestic Violence Hotline Services Assessment Framework Based on Theory

The purpose of this contract is to develop a theoretical framework and an approach for ongoing evaluation and performance measurement for The National Domestic Violence Hotline (The Hotline) and loveisrespect (LIR), the help line targeted towards young people. To accomplish this goal, the research team will build and test a theoretical framework based on existing behavior change theory to characterize the needs and requests of those who contact The Hotline and LIR, the services provided by the Hotline and LIR to meet those needs, and the out- comes for those who contact The Hotline and LIR.

The project will also incorporate input from key stakeholders and experts in the field of domestic violence research and practice into the development of the framework and approach for evaluation. Subject to the availability of funds and other considerations, the project will also conduct activities to improve the operationalization and measurement of The Hotline and LIR services and develop and pilot a user-centered tool to produce ongoing just-in-time summaries of The Hotline and LIR data. The contract was awarded to Westat with a subcontract to the University of Pittsburgh.





## CROSS-CUTTING AND OTHER RESEARCH

In addition to research that falls clearly within the substantive areas of family strengthening, DFS leads or is involved in OPRE projects whose focus spans the issues facing low-income children and families in a cross-cutting way. These cross-cutting projects may look at the populations served by multiple ACF programs, may include family strengthening as one among multiple foci, or may focus on research methodology to support high-quality evaluations across OPRE work.

### OPRE Methods Inquires

OPRE regularly convenes meetings of scientists and research experts to advance the scientific understanding of critical topics in social science research methodology. These meetings bring together experts from varying disciplines and policy fields and from academia, government, and the private sector to explore innovations in research design, analytic techniques, and data measurement that could be employed to advance the government's use of rigorous research methods. They are intended to help OPRE understand the history of the field, recent advances, and gaps in current knowledge, as well as examine how to build a research agenda to fill those gaps. They also ensure that OPRE-supported research continues to represent the most scientifically advanced approaches to determining effectiveness and efficiency of ACF programs.

To date, OPRE has sponsored nine annual innovative methods meetings on the following topics: Bayesian Methods, rapid learning methods, effect size, sub-group analysis, implementation science, innovative directions in estimating impact, methods for unpacking the “black box” of programs and policies, using administrative data in social policy research, and alternatives to randomized controlled trials. The topic of the most recent meeting, held in October 2018, was “Rapid Learning: Methods for Testing and Evaluating Change in Social Service Programs.” Materials from all of OPRE's past methods meetings, including agendas, presentations, and publications, are available at [www.opremethodsmeeting.org](http://www.opremethodsmeeting.org). The contractor for the annual OPRE methods meetings is Insight Policy Research.

### Center for Research on Hispanic Children and Families

The National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families generates new research and translates research across three priority areas—poverty reduction and self-sufficiency, healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, and early care and education—to build knowledge and inform ACF programs and policies to better serve Hispanic children and families. The

Center has three primary goals: 1) advance a cutting-edge research agenda; 2) build research capacity; and 3) translate emerging research. In 2014, the Center launched a Summer Research Fellowship program supporting emerging scholars studying issues relevant to low-income and vulnerable Hispanic children and families. For more information about the research activities and resources of the National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families, see <http://www.hispanicresearchcenter.org/>

### Self-Regulation and Toxic Stress Series

OPRE commissioned a series of four inter-related reports titled Self-Regulation and Toxic Stress from a team at the Center for Child and Social Policy at Duke University. The first report, Foundations for Understanding Self-Regulation from an Applied Developmental Perspective provides a comprehensive framework for understanding self-regulation in context, using a theoretical model that reflects the influence of biology, caregiving, and the environment on the development of self-regulation. The second report, A Review of Ecological, Biological, and Developmental Studies of Self-Regulation and Stress provides a cross-disciplinary review of research on the relationship between stress and self-regulation. The third report, A Comprehensive Review of Self-Regulation Interventions from Birth through Young Adulthood describes the strength of evidence for interventions to promote self-regulation for universal and targeted populations across development. The fourth and final report, Implications for Programs and Practice considers implications of findings from the two literature reviews for programs supported by the Administration for Children and Families.

Other resources have been developed based on these reports:

- Practice briefs synthesize information regarding particular age groups (including a brief focused on implications of these reports for adolescence and young adulthood);
- Briefs focused on a particular topic (including a brief focused on the relevance of self-regulation for Native communities);
- Snap shots that summarize key concepts about self-regulation and intervention across six age groups for practitioners and educators; and
- Practitioner tip sheets that describe how child care professionals and teachers can support the development of self-regulation in young children.

## LINKS TO PROJECTS AND REPORTS

### SUPPORTING FATHERHOOD

Building Bridges and Bonds

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/building-bridges-and-bonds>

Fatherhood Research and Practice Network

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/the-fatherhood-research-and-practice-network>

Fathers and Child Welfare Project

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/engaging-fathers-and-paternal-relatives-a-continuous-quality-improvement-approach-in-the-child-welfare-system-2017-2020-overview>

Ex-Prisoner Reentry Strategies Study

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/ex-prisoner-reentry-strategies-study>

Preventing and Addressing Intimate Violence When Engaging Dads

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/preventing-and-addressing-intimate-violence-by-engaging-dads-paived>

Trauma-Informed Approaches to Serving Justice-Involved Fathers

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/parents-and-children-together-pact-evaluation>

### STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS

Strengthening Relationship Education and Marriage Services

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/strengthening-relationship-education-and-marriage-services-streams>

Parents and Children Together

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/parents-and-children-together-pact-evaluation>

Fatherhood and Marriage Local Evaluation and Cross-Site Project

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/fatherhood-and-marriage-local-evaluation-famle-and-cross-site-project>

Self-Regulation Training Approaches and Resources to Improve Staff Capacity for Implementing Healthy Marriage Programs for Youth (SARHM)

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/self-regulation-training-approaches-improve-staff-implementing-healthy-marriage-programs-youth-2017-2019-overview>

Youth Education and Relationship Services Project

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/youth-education-and-relationship-services-years>

## FAMILY STRENGTHENING SCHOLARS GRANTS

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/family-strengthening-scholars>

## CAPACITY BUILDING

The Design Options for Home Visiting Evaluation

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/design-options-for-home-visiting-2>

<http://www.jbassoc.com/reports-publications/dohve>

The Tribal Evaluation Institute

<http://www.tribaleval.org/>

The Fatherhood and Marriage Local Evaluation and Cross-Site project

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/fatherhood-and-marriage-local-evaluation-famle-and-cross-site-project>

Fatherhood Research and Practice Network

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/the-fatherhood-research-and-practice-network>

Center for Research on Hispanic Children and Families

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/center-for-research-on-hispanic-children-families>

The Tribal Early Childhood Research Center

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/tribal-early-childhood-research-center>

## HOME VISITING: NURTURING CHILDREN THROUGH FAMILIES

Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation (MIHOPE)

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/maternal-infant-and-early-childhood-home-visiting-evaluation-mihope>

Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation – Check In

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/mihope-check-in-project>

MIHOPE Long-Term Follow-up

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/mother-and-infant-home-visiting-program-evaluation-long-term-follow-up>

Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation – Strong Start

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/mother-and-infant-home-visiting-program-evaluation-strong-start-mihope-ss>

Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness

<https://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/>

Design Options for Home Visiting Evaluation

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/design-options-for-home-visiting-evaluation-dohve-2010-2015>



Tribal Home Visiting Evaluation Institute

<http://www.tribaleval.org/>

Multi-Site Implementation Evaluation of Tribal Home Visiting

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/multi-site-implementation-evaluation-of-tribal-home-visiting-muse-2011-2016-overview>

Tribal Early Childhood Research Center

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/tribal-early-childhood-research-center>

<http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/PublicHealth/research/centers/CAIANH/trc/Pages/TRC.aspx>

The Assessment and Mapping of Community Connections in Home Visiting

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/assessment-and-mapping-of-community-connections-in-home-visiting-2017-2018-overview>

Touchpoints for Addressing Substance Use Issues in Home Visiting

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/touchpoints-for-addressing-substance-abuse-in-home-visiting-2017-2020-overview>

Family Level Assessment and State of Home Visiting

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/family-level-assessment-and-state-of-home-visiting>

Home Visiting Career Trajectories

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/home-visiting-career-trajectories>

Home Visiting - Approaches to Father Engagement and Fathers' Experiences

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/home-visiting-approaches-to-father-engagement-and-fathers-experiences>

## SPOTLIGHT ON FAMILY STRENGTHENING RESEARCH FOR AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVES

Tribal Home Visiting Evaluation Institute

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/tribal-home-visiting-evaluation-institute-2011-2015>

Tribal Early Childhood Research Center

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/tribal-early-childhood-research-center>

HomVEE: Assessing the Evidence of Effectiveness of Home Visiting Program Models Implemented in Tribal Communities Report

[https://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/HomVEE\\_Tribal\\_Report\\_2014-57.pdf](https://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/HomVEE_Tribal_Report_2014-57.pdf)

Tribal TANF-Child Welfare Coordination Data Capacity Building

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/tribal-tanf-child-welfare-coordination-data-capacity-building>

Multi-Site Implementation Evaluation of Tribal Home Visiting

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/multi-site-implementation-evaluation-of-tribal-home-visiting-muse-2011-2016-overview>

## SUPPORTING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND REDUCING TEEN PREGNANCY

Personal Responsibility Education Program – Multi Component Evaluation (PREP MCE)

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/personal-responsibility-education-program-prep-multi-component>

Personal Responsibility Education Program: Promising Youth Programs

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/personal-responsibility-education-program-promising-youth-programs-prep-pyp>

PREP Studies of Performance Measures and Adult Preparation Subjects

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/prep-studies-of-performance-measures-and-adult-preparation-subjects>

Model on Risk Avoidance Theory and Research, Informing an Optimal Health Model

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/model-on-risk-avoidance-theory-and-research-informing-an-optimal-health-model-2017-overview>

Model Empowering Youth to Resume Abstinence and Seek Optimal Health Now

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/model-empowering-youth-to-resume-abstinence-and-seek-optimal-health-now>

Savings from Sexual Avoidance and Empowerment over Risks

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/savings-from-sexual-avoidance-and-empowerment-over-risks>

Youth Empowerment Information, Data Collection, and Exploration on Avoidance of Sex

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/youth-empowerment-information-data-collection-and-exploration-on-avoidance-of-sex>

Transitional Living Program Evaluation Studies

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/transitional-living-program-evaluation-studies>

## PREVENTING FAMILY VIOLENCE

Responding to Intimate Violence In Relationship Programs

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/responding-to-intimate-violence-in-relationship-programs-rivir>

Accomplishments of the Domestic Violence Hotline, On-line Connections, and Text

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/accomplishments-of-the-domestic-violence-hotline-on-line-connections-and-text>

National Domestic Violence Hotline Services Assessment Framework based on Theory

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/national-domestic-violence-hotline-ndvh-services-assessment-framework-based-on-theory-saf-t>

## CROSS CUTTING AND OTHER RESEARCH

Self-Regulation and Toxic Stress Series

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/toxic-stress-and-self-regulation-reports>

OPRE Methods Inquiries

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/methods-inquiries>

Center for Research on Hispanic Children & Families

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/center-for-research-on-hispanic-children-families>

<https://www.childtrends.org/hispanic-institute>

## ACF EVALUATION POLICY

ACF's Evaluation Policy, published in the Federal Register on August 29, 2014, articulates five major principles for conducting evaluations and using evidence to inform policy and practice:

- **Rigor:** ACF is committed to using the most rigorous methods that are appropriate for the evaluation questions, budget, and other constraints.
- **Relevance:** Evaluation priorities should take into account legislative requirements and Congressional interests and should reflect the interests and needs of ACF, HHS, and Administration leadership; program office staff and leadership; ACF partners such as states, territories, tribes, and local grantees; the populations served; researchers; and other stakeholders. Evaluations should be designed to represent the diverse populations that ACF programs serve.
- **Transparency:** ACF will make information about planned and ongoing evaluations easily accessible, typically through posting on the web information about the contractor or grantee conducting the work and descriptions of the evaluation questions, methods to be used, and expected timeline for reporting results.
- **Independence:** To promote objectivity, ACF protects independence in the design, conduct, and analysis of evaluations.
- **Ethics:** ACF-sponsored evaluations will be conducted in an ethical manner and safeguard the dignity, rights, safety and privacy of participants.

ACF's full Evaluation Policy can be found [here](#).