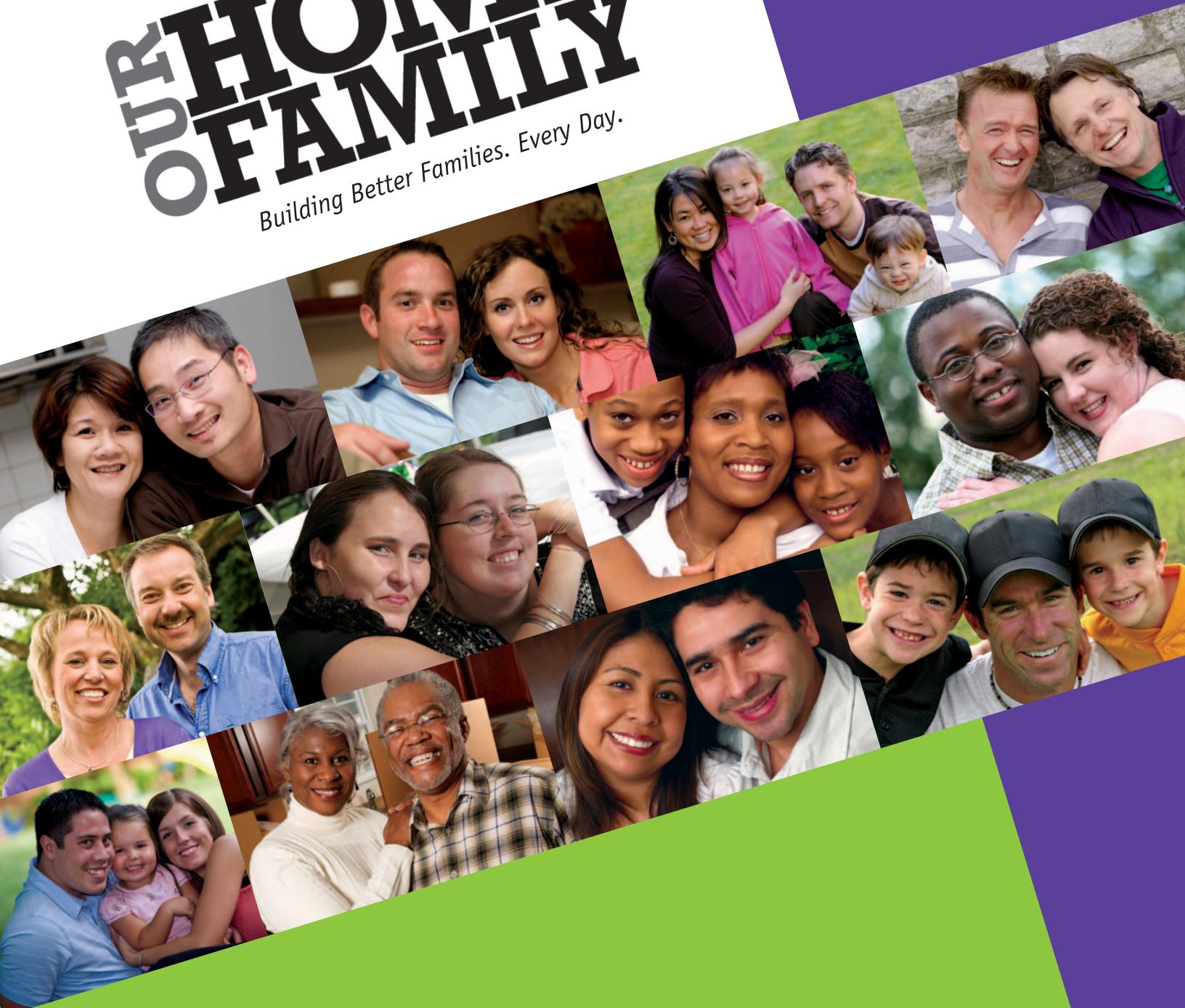


OUR HOME OF FAMILY™

Building Better Families. Every Day.



Executive Summary



Executive Summary

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*“This program is life changing.
This has changed our perspective and
our family has benefited.”*

A NEW WAY TO STRENGTHEN FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Families that step forward to foster and adopt abused and neglected children are committed and strong of heart. Still, the children's behavioral challenges place relationships under extreme stresses that can threaten long-term placement.

Beyond finding homes, Adoption Resources of Wisconsin (ARW) recognized the need for families and children to be successful after their placements. Our families reported seeking care from multiple therapists over several years without significant benefit. The experience left parents feeling overwhelmed and inadequate. Some parents even sought removal of these children from the home, because they could no longer handle the stress.

ARW has long believed there are more effective ways to strengthen families. Using insights gained from a quarter century of providing support to adoptive families, we knew that improving couples' communication and coaching skills results in stable, better functioning families.

In 2004, ARW sought and received an Adoption Opportunities grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under the Healthy Marriage initiative. Over six years, ARW monitored the delivery of the training curriculum, and then rigorously monitored its effectiveness through evaluation designed with the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, School of Educational Psychology.

In developing the curriculum, ARW partnered with LCLC, Inc (LCLC). Together, ARW and LCLC developed the specialized communication/relationship curriculum Our Home Our Family™ (OHOF), described by one participant as "one of best things that happened to us as a couple and a family."



A NEW WAY TO STRENGTHEN FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Our Home Our Family™ provides truly unique research-based techniques, programs, products and services – and measurable outcomes. Extensive testing, over five years, of more than 100 participating couples and over 200 children in the study, documents the training's significant results, including:

Couple stability

Just over 1% of couples surveyed divorced during the five year research grant.

This is remarkable in light of population average divorce rates (per 1,000 per year):

- Families with disabilities 6.6
- All couples 3.5
- WI couples 2.9
- OHOF couples 2.4

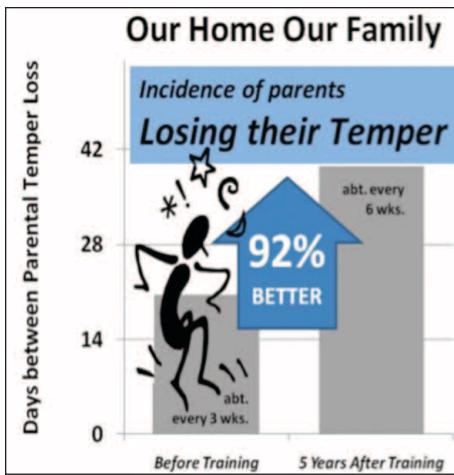
Family stability and growth

- 46% fewer moves for children. Fewer children (Seven compared to thirteen) re-entered some type of out-of-home care. The number of children who moved, even temporarily, into alternative care was reduced – despite many challenges.
- 97% of couples felt their family functioning had improved.
- 98% of couples reported increased knowledge, skills and awareness.
- 99% of couples felt that others better understood their family's challenges.
- On average, couples reported a 380% increase in confidence when dealing with children's behavior. (About a four-fold improvement).

Parents showed gains under testing for the following:

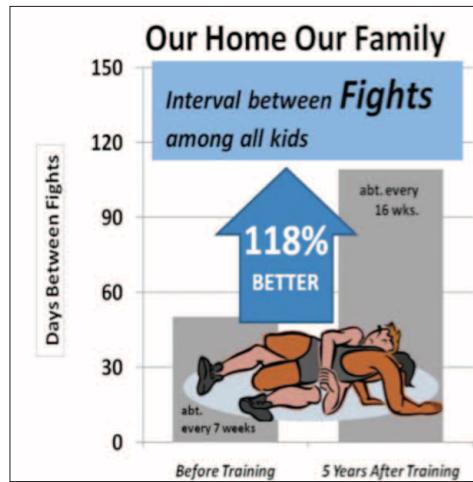
- Depression rates (Beck Depression) reduced and held at 3 months and 1 year.
- Marital satisfaction rates (Dyadic Adjustment) improved and was still stronger at one year.

*“This experience opened our hearts,
emotions and minds to become better
partners and parents.”*

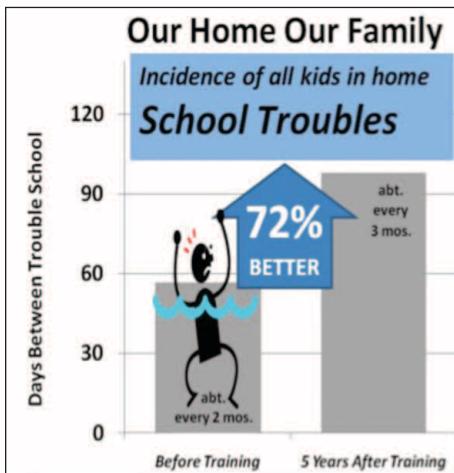


92% parental improvement in loss of temper

118% increase in the interval between children's fights



72% increase in the interval between episodes of children's administrative troubles at school



Parents struggling to create strong families for society's most challenged children need and deserve assistance, but are often abandoned without it. With *Our Home Our Family™*, couples have achieved significant success – short and long term. The OHOF curriculum can be used equally effectively with adoptive and foster families, because the specific concepts and development skills are practical and universal. As another participant explained, "This is the kind of program that gives families the kind of help that really is *helpful*."

PARENTS: A STRONG RELATIONSHIP AT THE CORE OF A STRONG FAMILY

Committed to their children, adoptive and foster families are wonderful advocates for services for their children. In fact, the desire to help their children is the biggest factor motivating families to attend the OHOF sessions. Despite couples' dedication, research indicates that placement of children in the home brings greater conflict and lower satisfaction between couples. Some studies show that couples raising children with special needs experience much higher incidences of sadness, worry, anger, confusion and guilt. Studies also show that the inverse relationship between special needs and parental satisfaction is stronger in adoptive/foster families than biological families.

To be successful foster or adoptive parents, couples need one another's support. Because there was no marriage/relationship curriculum available to meet the unique needs of adoptive and foster families, OHOF is designed to fill the gap. OHOF focuses specifically on the area of relationship and communication, using sound research and proven training principles, allowing easy replication anywhere.

The program teaches communication skills and techniques that help families lessen tension and strengthen the relationships between couples and between parents and their children. Using *Our Home Our Family™*, couples build the skills needed to talk to each other with love and respect. They learn to talk about the "big" stuff when they disagree and resolve differences. They also learn to be united on issues when talking to their children, and to talk to them in ways that get results. This unified communication model helps to eliminate "game playing" by children, and allows children to look at two parents and see one parenting unit.

OHOF also teaches couples to recognize the importance of making time to take care of themselves and their own adult relationships to better handle the day-to-day challenges of parenting. It helps them to let go of past hurts and concentrate on becoming a strong family.

As parents become good role models for children and their relationships, young adults can learn about treating relationships seriously and committing to them.

"It has strengthened our marriage so much. It has made our family happier, more peaceful."

PROFILE OF THE OHOF STUDY PARENTS/FAMILIES

The Parents

Families who attended *Our Home Our Families* sessions came from 25 of Wisconsin's 72 counties, some driving two or more hours. The biggest factor bringing families to the program was their desire to help their children. Even fathers who were not sure they were in the right place, when they heard "marriage relationship," said they "stuck it out" because they so loved their children and wanted them to get better and to have a higher quality family life.

- **95% of the families completed the six full-day training sessions.**

The majority of families who adopt from foster care are lower/middle-income families, although parents in the study were all ages and levels of economic stability. Many were foster families in addition to being adoptive families. One family had fostered over 200 children – from teens to short-term infant placements – over many years. Couples were remarkably open. During training, these couples shared intimate, personal experiences with ARW staff, including incest, sexual assault, major health issues and loss of employment.

Demographics:

Number of Families Trained.....	104
Number of Families Evaluated	88
Percentage of African American Families	18%
Number of Interracial Couples	2
Percentage of Families with Interracial Adoptions	43%
Average Age of Wife	44.5
Average Age of Husband.....	46.3

Research shows that children often have a brief "honeymoon" when they enter a family before they settle in, but start to show more challenging behaviors. Although the parents receive basic training, they are never fully prepared for the hard work. Parents are usually unprepared when faced with the sometimes harsh realities of placement.

ARW restricted OHOF participation to couples who had adopted children from the child welfare system. At least one child from every family had to be between five and eleven years of age at the time of the class.

ARW sought families that understood their children's problems, challenges and behaviors. So, the child needed to have been with his or her adoptive family for a minimum of two years. This gave the children substantial time to settle into their adoptive placements.

PROFILE OF THE OHOF STUDY PARENTS/FAMILIES

The Evaluated Children: 193 in 88 Evaluated Families

All children identified in the family were tested as part of the OHOF project. Over 75% of the families indicated that they had a child with a behavioral or learning diagnosis. This meant that parents reported having one or more adoptive children with at least one of the following:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD)
- And/or an identified learning disability

Parents were encouraged to base their reports on the opinions of professionals, but diagnoses were not independently verified.

The majority of children had seen a mental health therapist (only 18% had not):

- 57% had seen 1 to 4 different therapists
- 23% had seen 5 to 8 different therapists
- 2% had seen 9 to 14 different therapists

Demographics:

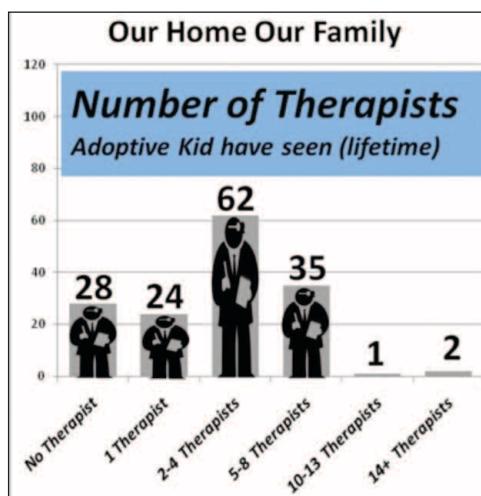
Average number of children in family 3

Average number of adopted children per family 2

Average age at adoption 9.4 years

Average foster care placement per child prior to adoption 2.7

Boys and girls in study Equal percentage



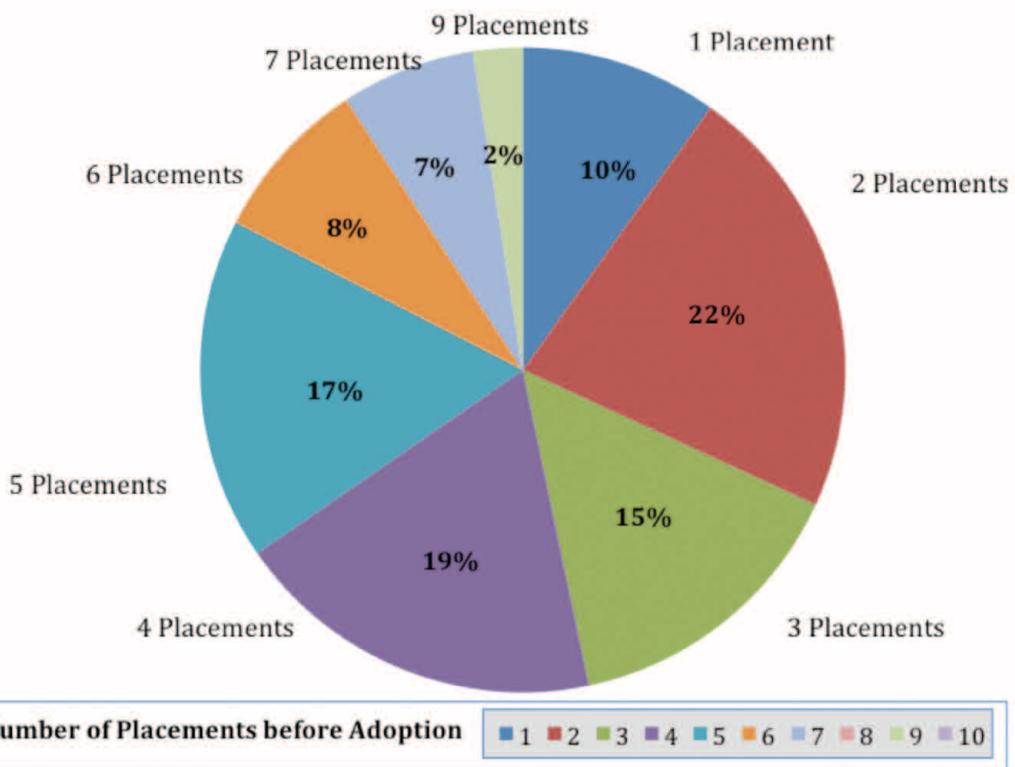
"Unbelievably helpful to families with the large task of raising hurt kids."

PROFILE OF THE OHOF STUDY PARENTS/FAMILIES

Children on the Move

Each time a child moves, it injects additional trauma into his or her life. The child must continually learn a new family's style, and often acclimate to a new school and friends. Some of the children in the study experienced four or more placements with multiple moves. Once adopted, children who have moved so often can feel uncertain whether they will succeed in a new family. They lack confidence that this will be a permanent placement. As a result, the children act out, testing families on a regular basis to see if this new family will stick with them – no matter how bad their behavior. Too often, these children are diagnosed with some level of attachment disorder.

Our Home Our Family Population Proportion of Foster Placements Prior to Adoption



THE BACK STORY: **OUR HOME OUR FAMILY™ CURRICULUM**

Keeping families together provides stability for children who have been moved often in their young lives. The cost of failed adoptions is significant. Returning children to treatment foster care or placement in a residential treatment center are both expensive and disruptive. More significantly, when 50% of the homeless teens on the streets were once in foster care, we, as a society, have a huge problem.

Throughout the U.S. today, post-placement support for foster and adoptive families is significantly under-funded. Most of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) evaluations of states in the Child and Family Services Review reveal an astounding lack of post-placement services.

A key theory was evident in the OHOF study. For quality family functioning, couples need new skills and specialized training to improve their communication styles with each other and their children. This training needs to be intensive, with some ongoing support over time. OHOF meets these critical needs.

The curriculum was used by nine class cohorts over the five years of the study – 104 couples and more than 200 children with an unparalleled 95% completion rate. The OHOF curriculum is built on the concepts, research and initiatives of the Loving Couples Loving Children™ curriculum. The OHOF curriculum is research-based, drawing on the work of notable experts in the areas of marriage, family and relationships, as well as specific areas associated with adoption and foster care. In addition, it draws from the practical experiences and long history of adoption and foster care work conducted by Adoption Resources of Wisconsin. Together, these two organizations (ARW and LCLC) have built an evidence-based, practical and manageable program that benefits foster and adoptive families.

The goal of OHOF was to teach new skills and to effectively evaluate progress of the parents and children from before training implementation and, subsequently at various time intervals over the course of the study. OHOF was independently evaluated using a process developed by Dr. Thomas Baskin and Margaret Rhody of the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Department of Educational Psychology. Selected nationally-recognized and validated test instruments evaluated marital satisfaction, family functioning, forgiveness improvements and mental health metrics: depression, anxiety and anger.

Long-term evaluation showed that improvements in marital satisfaction, forgiveness and depression held generally at the three month and one year points. Somewhat surprisingly, Anger and Anxiety indices were generally low at pre-test and remained low throughout training and testing.

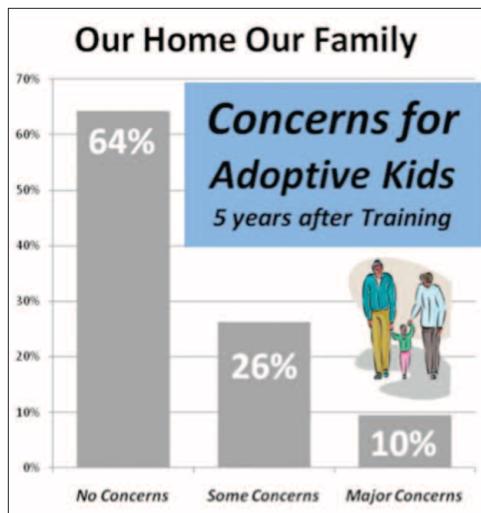
THE BACK STORY: OUR HOME OUR FAMILY™ CURRICULUM

Major specialized test instruments included the following:

- Unusually extensive testing: Pre-training test, immediate post-training test, three month, one-year and a cumulative five-year test for all participants.
- An array of nationally recognized benchmark test instruments and specialized assessment tools for both parents and children
 - Dyadic Adjustment Scale
 - Marriage and Forgiveness Knowledge Scale
 - Beck Depression Inventory
 - STAI Anger and Anxiety Scales
 - A retrospective post-test (at end of training)
 - The Family Stress and Support Test (Year 5 Final Evaluation only)

Families strongly indicated that they learned new skills that improved the way their families function in concrete and meaningful ways. Most families also felt strongly that OHOF was the most effective training they had ever received.

Five years after training, the reduced level of concern for their children among couples was remarkable – especially in light of the children’s demographics, as many of them were beginning to enter their typically challenging teen years by the close of the program.



*“We are having
more family nights.”*

THE OUR HOME OUR FAMILY™ CURRICULUM

OHOF is a mature training tool designed to be easily replicated with a high degree of measurable effectiveness: facilitator training, facilitator manuals, parent workbooks, modules with DVD components and an online testing program that allows feedback and family performance metrics throughout the training cycle. OHOF also allows for cross-jurisdictional testing.

An online evaluation and reporting tool for the curriculum makes it easy and cost-effective to monitor concepts/skills learned and offers basic stress and support measures that are linked to those in the study. It has the ability to aggregate data for any facilitator, class or organization and to provide feedback to assess and tweak facilitator's skills for optimal success.

Evaluation of *Our Home Our Family*™ indicates that it is incredibly effective at teaching needed and practical skills that couples can incorporate into their families. The curriculum has been used effectively for both straight and LGBT couples and their families.

OHOF is thorough. Because good training takes place in an atmosphere that lends trust and safety to the families, the curriculum details everything needed to facilitate an effective training experience:

- Extensive facilitator pre-training for presenters
- Content-rich, spiral-bound Couples workbooks for each participant
- An orientation that encourages families in the cohort to get to know each other
- Homework assignments for parents to do with each other and with their children
- Number of modules and frequency
- Class schedules
- Classroom layout
- Comforts (food, special seating if needed, blankets)
- Optimum participant size
- Graduation that serves to acknowledge and positively reinforce every couple's hard work

Reinforcement through home-based practice is a vital component of OHOF. Skills and concepts are re-emphasized from class to class to help participants retain knowledge and skills.

THE OUR HOME OUR FAMILY™ CURRICULUM

The core OHOF curriculum includes a “Getting Started” orientation to the program and teaches concepts and skills in modules that significantly improve the health of family relationships:

Level One

- Getting Started (orientation and theoretical framework for curriculum)
- Post Placement Realities
- Staying Close
- Relationship Warning Signs
- Constructive Relationship Problem Solving

Level Two

- Child Development Stages and Adoption
- Emotion Coaching
- Reaching Your Boiling Point
- Working Toward Compromise

Level Three

- What Children do to Relationships
- Relationship Recovery Conversations
- Honoring Dreams
- Building Emotional Connections



OHOF also offers several supplemental curriculums:

Healing Emotional Wounds

- Heal Emotional Wounds
- Child Traumatic Stress

Honoring Your Children

- Respecting the Child
- Birth Family Connections

Managing Family Stress

- Handling Stress Together
- Family Tasks and Responsibilities

DVDs accompany the core and supplemental curricula. DVDs specifically geared to the needs of LGBT families are in development.

Based on the evaluations, the OHOF curriculum is most effective when taught for at least four sessions over a like-number of weeks. It is optimal to provide some time between training to allow families to incorporate new skills into their lives. Of course, due to the intensity of the training, more modules bring additional affects.

WHY FAMILIES LIKE OHOF

Families appreciated the outcomes of the OHOF experience. Couples shared that they had not taken time in years to think about their own relationships. They understood, through the training, that a strong relationship is key to maintaining stability in the family and a unified approach to handle challenges. One of the couples came into the project with their divorce papers filed – this class was their last chance. They are still married today and felt that their relationship was the best it had ever been.

Families liked the exercises, which were very focused on skills. They liked that there were exercises for them, as couples, as well as exercises to complete with their children. They appreciated the atmosphere created by OHOF that lends trust and safety to families, so critical for good training. And they appreciated all of the additional support provided by the project:

- Child care stipend
- “Date night” and testing stipends
- Resource assistance
- Library access
- Other training opportunities

One very significant outcome of the training was that parents lost their tempers less often.



FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Researchers describe healthy relationships as those that are “emotionally intelligent.” By this they mean that negative thoughts and feelings about the other, which all partners have, do not override positive feelings, and that effective communication between couples is based on skills that can be learned and practiced. ARW recognized that healthy relationships are threatened when day-to-day struggles with their children overwhelm families. Couples lose sight of enjoying each member of the family, helping support each other and working as a team.

Many surveyed adoptive parents cited a lack of post-adoptive services as a reason for displacement or disruption before an adoption could be finalized. Foster parents also identified the need for a curriculum that trains them in the skills of relationship-building. Whether a child is with them for a short or long-term placement, they need to develop strong relationships with the child, and sometimes with his extended family, while, at the same time, maintaining a healthy family themselves. *Our Home Our Family™* gives organizations that work with foster and adoptive families an effective tool to train parents. OHOF provides practical ideas and skills that can be successfully applied to improve communication within families, reduce stress and enhance family functioning.

Our Home Our Family™ prepares families to better share their fears, their hopes and their dreams for the future.

“This program has significantly increased my capacity to love, care for, forgive and be forgiven by my family, friends and co-workers. Thank you.”

OUR HOME OUR FAMILY™ DEVELOPERS

Adoption Resources of Wisconsin is a nonprofit organization that has been providing information, services and support to Wisconsin's foster and adoptive families since 1984. It serves over 22,000 families each year with its information, training, webinars, extensive web content and direct support services.

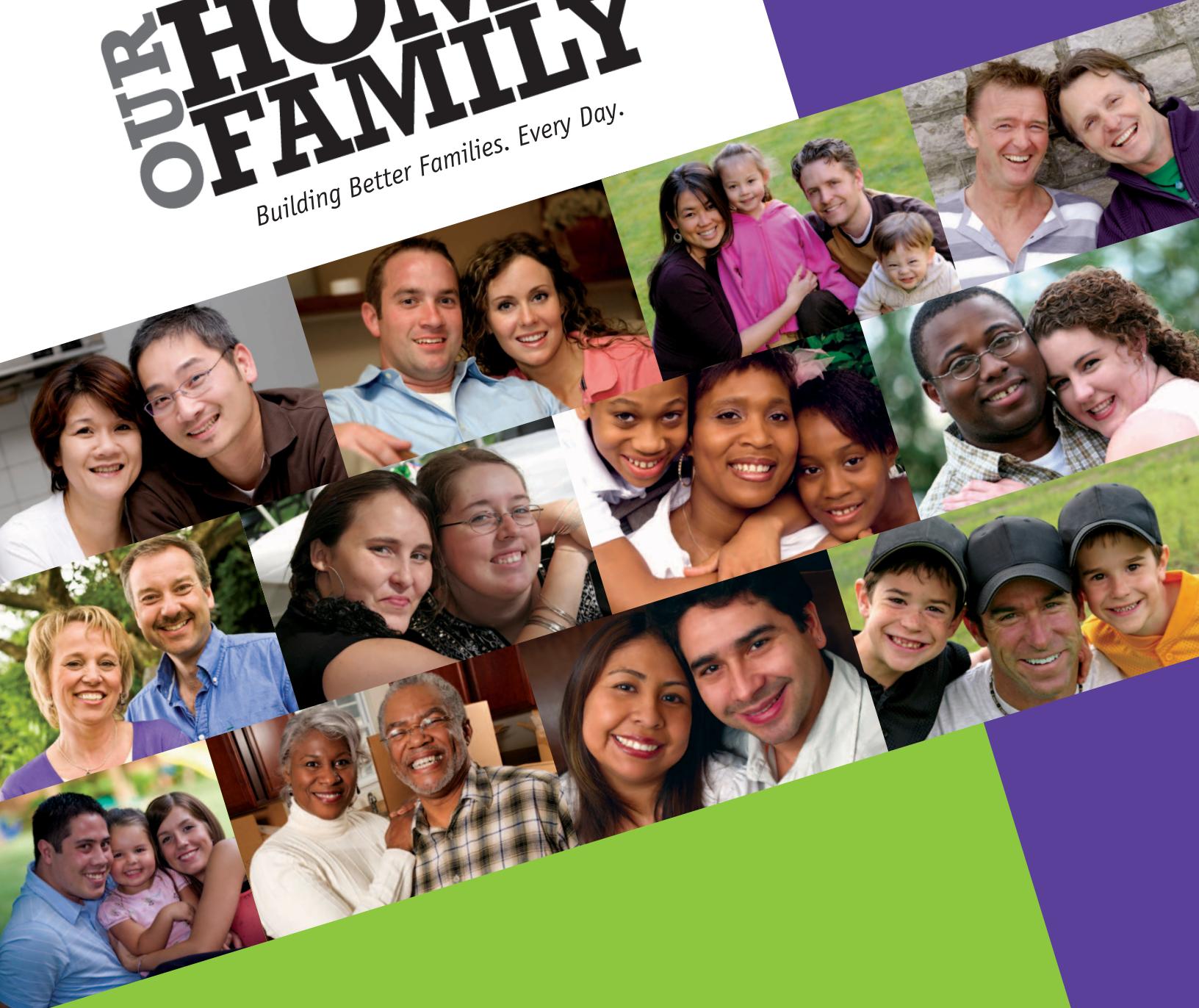
LCLC, Inc. is a curriculum development and training company based in Seattle, Washington. They have developed training and materials for a variety of populations and initiatives, including low-income unmarried couples as part of the Building Strong Families Project, a marriage curriculum for the Supporting Healthy Marriages project, and a single parent curriculum for Head Start grants as part of the Administration for Children and Families. All curricula are available in English and Spanish.



“As you know, our daughter has been with us seven years now. Just this week, she gave me a hug for the first time.”

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A partnership of Adoption Resources of Wisconsin and LCLC, Inc, Seattle

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