

\$3.47M Grant Helps Improve Relationship Skills in At-Risk Teens

11/10/2020



Kay Bradford, professor in the Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) department of the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at USU, recently received a \$3.47 million grant to further his work improving relationship outcomes for at-risk teens in Utah. Bradford is joined on this grant by Brian Higgenbotham, HDFS professor and Associate Vice President for Extension, and Scott Crapo, postdoctoral fellow.

During this three-year project, funded by the U.S. HHS Office of Population Affairs, facilitators will teach healthy relationship skills to at-risk teens in alternative high schools and behavioral health agencies across the Wasatch Front. These teens tend to have fragile family relationships and high rates of sexual risk. The curriculum is designed to improve healthy relationships and reduce risky behaviors. Researchers will also examine the program's impact on teens' well-being and family functioning.

In the past five years, Bradford and Higgenbotham have collaborated with Healthy Relationships Utah to provide a nationally available relationship program called "How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk/Jerkette," developed by researcher Dr. John Van Epp. This program has been delivered statewide to over 40,000 teens, but Bradford's team have seen that some youth need a more intensive curriculum that teaches healthy relationship skills.

Aided by this new grant, Bradford aims to help teens understand how healthy relationships are formed, increasing their chances for future relationship and marital success. Creating this positive trajectory supports youth in

building a "success sequence" of reducing or eliminating sexual risk, helping them to enjoy the positive outcomes of healthy relationships.

In addition to promoting healthy marriages and families, a broader goal is to investigate how emotional intelligence and relationship skills support success in the workplace.