

## Communities and Congregations: A Grass Roots Strategy for Strengthening Marriages and Families

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Chair, Live the Life



## The Culture of Freedom Initiative (COFI)

a Philanthropic  
Experiment

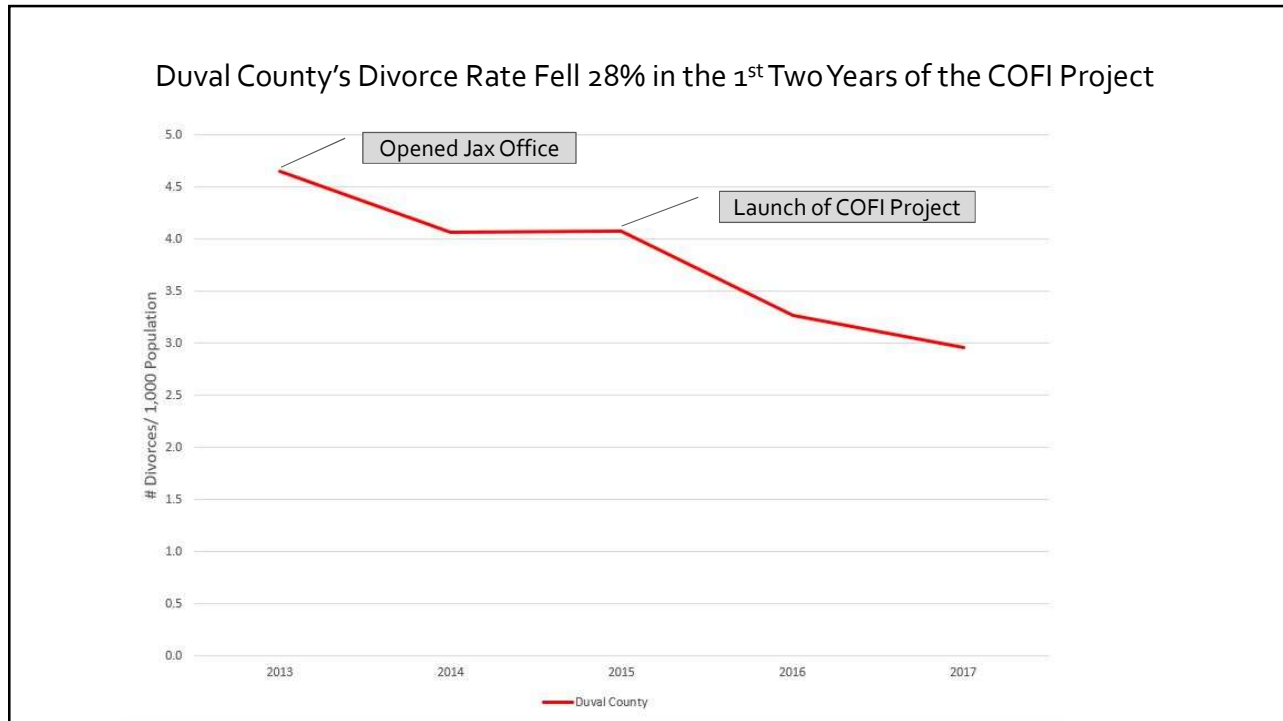
3 Cities – Jacksonville, Phoenix, Dayton

4 Goals:

- 1) Reduce divorce rate
- 2) Increase marriage rate
- 3) Reduce out of wedlock births
- 4) Increase church attendance

Characteristics:

- Substantial \$ investment
- Working primarily through churches
- Use of “big data”
- Anchor organization in each city

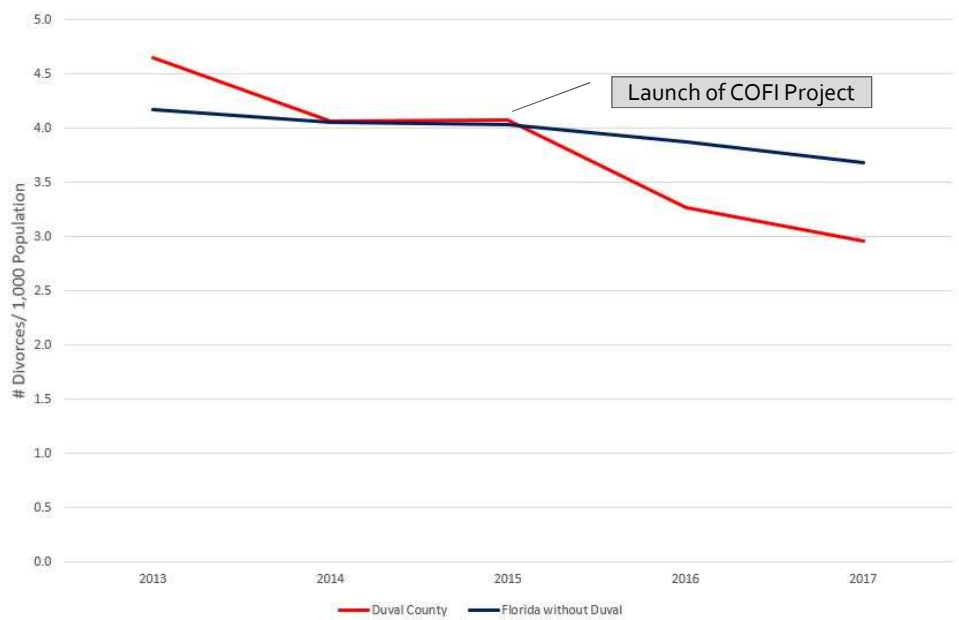


## Topics

- Is it Real?
- Is it Relevant?
- Is it Replicable?
- What Resources are Available?

Is it Real?

Decline in Duval's Divorce Rate Far Exceeded that for the Rest of Florida





# The Experts Weigh in

“Our initial data analysis suggests that the COFI effort with Live the Life and a range of religious and civic partners has had an exceptional impact on marital stability in Duval County. Since 2015, the county has witnessed a remarkable decline in divorce: from 2015 to 2017, the divorce rate fell 28 percent. As family scholars, we have rarely seen changes of this size in family trends over such a short period of time. Although it is possible that some other factor besides COFI’s intervention also helped, we think this is unlikely. In our professional opinion, given the available evidence, the efforts undertaken by COFI in Jacksonville appear to have had a marked effect on the divorce rate in Duval County.” (page 1)

- Brad Wilcox - University of Virginia
- Spencer James - Brigham Young University

“In Duval County, Florida there was an intervention or treatment that caused the dissolution rate to decrease to 3.3 / 1,000 (population) as opposed to what it should have done, and that was to increase to 4.1 / 1,000 (population)”

“Even without participant level data, the decrease in the rate per thousand of at least .8 / 1,000 from the trend analysis cannot be classified as a chance occurrence. It resulted from an interaction that was timely, effective, and resulted from program providers in Jacksonville who focused on keeping marriages together rather than allowed them to separate.”

- Florida State University – Florida Center  
for Prevention Research

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“While we cannot identify with certainty which parts of the Culture of Freedom Initiative project that Live the Life has led in Jacksonville over the past several years has had the most impact, the 28% reduction in divorce rate that Jacksonville has experienced over the past two years is a strong testimony to the overall effectiveness of this type of community-level intervention.”

- Florida State University – Florida Center  
for Prevention Research

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# Is it Relevant?

Social Issues Impacted by Marriage/Divorce



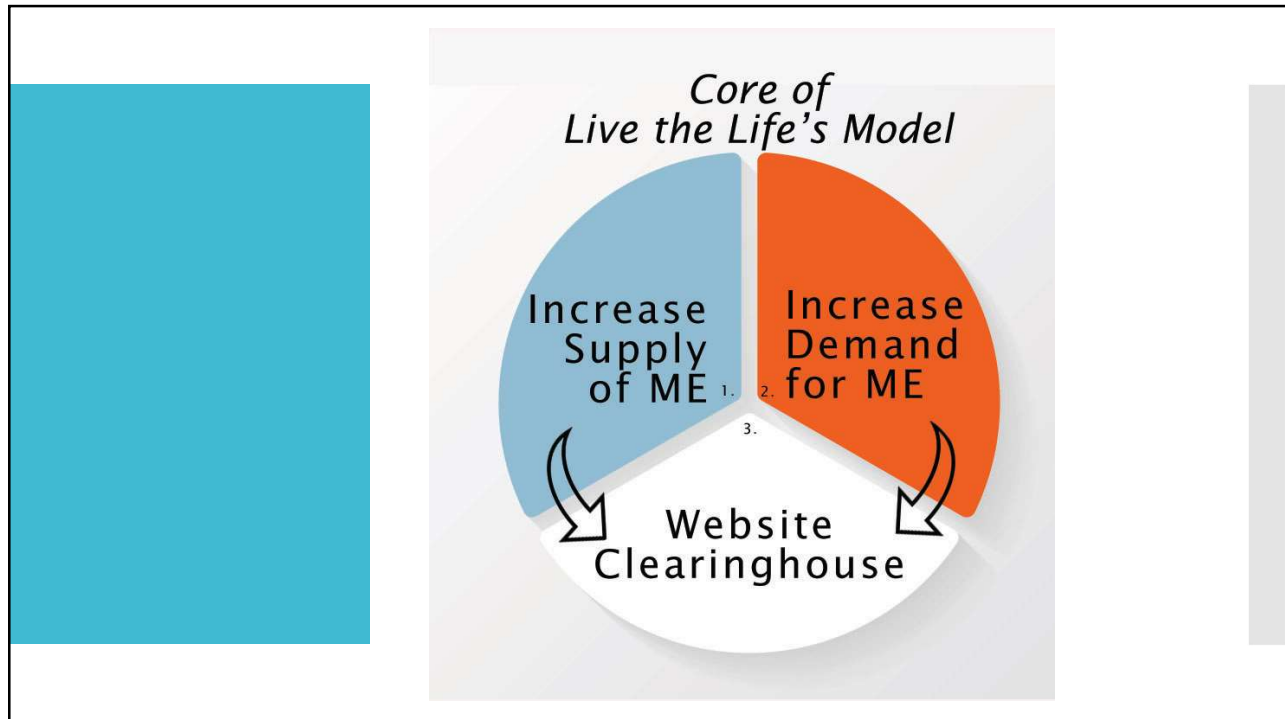
Estimated Public Cost +/- \$31,000 per Divorce

The word cloud contains the following terms: Longer Life, Infant Mortality, Alcohol Use, Smoking, Infant Mortality, Domestic Violence, Life Span, Sexual Assault, Carrying Weapons, Physical Health, STDs, Jailtime, Out of Wedlock Births, College Attendance, Expulsion, Child Abuse, Repeating a Grade, Need for Social Services, Depression, Low Self Esteem, Social Problems, Teen Pregnancy, Reading Ability, Drug Use, Home Ownership, Parenting, Suicide, Dropping out of School, Success In School, Higher Delinquency, Violence, Property Values, Illness, Longer Life, and Social Problems.

## Financial Implications

Year	Investment	% Reduced In Divorce Rate	Fewer Divorces	\$ Cost Savings to Taxpayers	Return on Investment
2016	\$900,000	17.6%	623	\$19.2 Million	2100%
2017	\$900,000	28%	923	\$28.4 Million	3200%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1.8 Million</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>1546</b>	<b>\$47.6 Million</b>	<b>2600%</b>

Is it Replicable?



**Increase Supply**

Overall theme: "Flood the market with Marriage-related programs and resources"

Two approaches:

- 1) Direct delivery of high quality programs (Adventures in Marriage; Hope Weekend)
- 2) "We empower local churches to implement highly effective, self-sustaining marriage ministries – balanced between Vision, Skills, and Support - across all the ages and stages of the marital life cycle"



Marriage  
Ministries  
Must be  
Balanced



## Vision

*God's plan and  
teachings for  
marriage*

### Examples:

- "Love one another....."
- Unconditional Love
- Indissolubility of Marriage
- Covenant versus Contract
- Mutual Submission
- Forgiveness
- Leaving and Cleaving

## Skills - "How To" love one another

- Speak effectively - in a way that will increase the chances of being listened to
- Listen effectively – in a way that shows your spouse that you truly understand them
- Show your spouse how, specifically, you appreciate them
- Apologize – and ask for forgiveness
- Forgive each other
- Resolve conflicts
- Jointly solve problems – in a way that the needs and desires of both parties are met and satisfied
- Understand each other's core emotional needs
- Meet each other's core emotional needs
- Show love in the way that matters most to our spouse
- Show respect to and for our spouse
- Cherish our spouse
- Change our own habits
- Support our spouse in their desire to change (without nagging)
- Follow through on decisions which were made
- How to make a request (as opposed to a demand)
- Change a criticism into a "complaint with a request for change"
- Parent effectively
- Co-parent effectively
- Understand how I am feeling
- Communicate to my spouse how I am feeling
- Understand how my spouse is feeling
- Understand what my spouse is thinking, is feeling, is concerned about, and desires
- Develop a budget – and operate with a budget
- Do financial planning – for the future
- Develop and show an interest - in the people and things that our spouse is interested in
- Regulate our own emotions
- Express anger and/or frustration and/or disappointment – in a healthy way – without damaging the relationship
- How to release our anger.....and/or frustration.....and/or disappointment
- Bond deeply with our spouse

## Support

### Examples:

- Skills Coaches: In-Class, Phone, Follow-up
- Mentors
- Small Groups
- After-Care
- Initial Contact for Crisis Couples
- Knowledge of Other Resources Available

## Marriage Ministries Must be Balanced



## Characteristics of the Model

- Heavy focus on churches
- It's about EMPOWERING the churches - building their self-sufficiency in this area - rather than us delivering the programs ourselves. This builds in sustainability
- We are CONSULTANTS, rather than salespeople
- Meet the needs of the churches
- Denominational approach
- Be Marriage-Passion Magnets ("Go with the goers")
- Saturation approach - every couple every year - destigmatize accessing marriage ministries
- Continuum of care model
- Vision/Skills/Support

## Challenges of Working with Churches

- Churches Have Bureaucracies
- Most Already Have Full Plates
- Can be a Slow Process

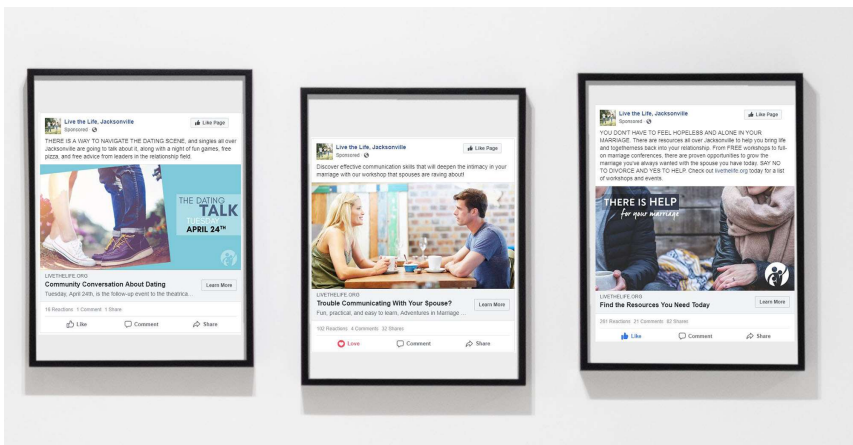
*Therefore - WHO you have working with churches is critical to this model's success*

Working with churches is not for the faint-hearted...

## Increase Demand

- Internal Demand - at the Individual Church
- Outside Referrals
- Radio Ads
- Micro-Targeted Facebook Ads

## Micro-Targeted Facebook Ads



5.1 million impressions in 2017 – most targeting high-risk couples

## Website Clearinghouse – where the increased demand finds the increased supply

# Vision

*God's plan and  
teachings for  
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## Examples:

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## Overview of Phase 1

- Increase Supply of marriage programs and resources
- Increase Demand for marriage programs and resources
- Community Marriage Resource Center website – where Increased Demand finds the Increased Supply

Now beginning roll-out of Phase 2 activities....

“It may be Easier to Reduce  
County-Wide Divorce Rates  
Than Previously Thought...”

Underlying  
Premise:

- Very few people ever really WANT to get a divorce.
- Divorces almost always occur because one or both people think their present situation is hopeless.

At one level, it could be just that simple  
– we “provide hope to the hopeless” by  
putting effective marriage resources in a  
community, and then letting people  
know they are there.

Let’s test this – by replicating the  
model...



## New Resources

[www.USMarriage.org](http://www.USMarriage.org) – a website clearinghouse that any community can use

## The Community Marriage Initiatives Fund

## Introducing.... .....the Community Marriage Initiatives Fund

The Purpose of the Community Marriage Initiatives Fund is to promote, encourage, and support community-wide implementation of Marriage Ministries as a way to reduce county-wide divorce rates.

### Funding Opportunity:

- Our target is to distribute up to twenty grants per year, of between \$10,000 to \$20,000 each to non-profit organizations who are interested in attempting to implement the model that is successfully being used in Jacksonville with the goal of significantly reducing their own county's divorce rate.

"Farm Team" model – lay the ground work for potential future larger grants from local philanthropists or other sources.

- These potential funders learn about the success of Jacksonville
- They see that your community has already made progress with this model

## Who is Eligible?

- Non-profit organizations
- Have track-record of assisting churches implement Marriage Ministries
- Want to expand that work
- Want to replicate the Jacksonville model
- Want to drive down their county's divorce rate
- Willing to network with other grantees – in order to share with and learn from each other
- Willing to work to raise additional funding – once they have a critical mass of programs in their community

## Next Steps:

- 1) Visit [www.MarriageInitiatives.org](http://www.MarriageInitiatives.org)
- 2) Participate in teleconference to find out more information and to get your questions answered
  - To indicate interest and get scheduled for one, send email to [Dennis@MarriageInitiatives.org](mailto:Dennis@MarriageInitiatives.org) – subject line "Teleconference"
- 3) Submit application