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## Our Vision

*The St. Louis Community will be a gateway for viable healthy marriages. It will be an advocate for life-long marriages built on respect, promoting relationship skills education to equip members of our community to make emotionally intelligent choices regarding marriage partners.*

*The St. Louis Health Marriage Coalition (SLHMC) promotes the fact that it is essential for both mothers and fathers to be active in the live of their children.*

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# St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition: Helping Families Stay Strong Together

Missouri courts now grant 426 divorces a week. More than 11,000 Missouri children are affected by divorce annually. By some estimates, the annual cost of divorce and un-wed childbearing to Missouri taxpayers add up to more than \$664 million.<sup>1</sup>

A campaign for healthier marriages aims to improve lives by strengthening families. Dedicated to the support of healthy marriages and families through education, **St. Louis Healthy Marriage** is a **coalition of social service agencies, including:** Aish HaTorah, ALIVE, Inc., CHAARM, Christian Family Services, Fathers' Support Center, Lutheran Family & Children's Services, Nurses For Newborns, Missouri 4-H Extension, Our Lady's Inn, and Wyman.

Working closely within these agency partners, **St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition** offers marriage and relationship-building education classes, where participants learn about improving communication, conflict management and parenting skills, as well as household and money management. Marriage preparation classes also equip people to make intelligent choices regarding marriage partners. Additionally, SLHMC promotes that it is essential for both mothers and fathers to be active in the lives of their children.

The coalition collaborates with several Faith communities in North St. Louis County including Abundant Life Fellowship Church where a Healthy Relationship Seminars have been sponsored for couples and for singles. SLHMC also is working to bring its programming to North St. Louis Countians though other community channels, such as health care. Currently, healthy marriage couples seminar is scheduled for Saturday Nov. 14 at the DePaul Medical Center. There is growing social science and health related research to support the positive benefits healthy marriage relationships bring to the quality of life and health outcomes of adults and children. The coalition aims to advance this knowledge within the St. Louis Community.

During three years, at least 600 couples, 1,200 families, and 3000 teens have benefited from the SLHMC relationship-enhancement courses offered with 60+ marriage instructors. **SLHMC served more than 2500 individuals in 2008 alone.**

Many participants are now volunteering to teach and mentor others in their communities and religious organizations.

SLHMC Executive Director, Bridget Brennan has been personally focused locally and nationally in promoting marriage-enhancement classes for over a decade. Four years ago, she persuaded a group of like-minded social-service agencies, large and small, to join the crusade. She then won a \$1 million dollar Fed. grant – renewed annually - from the Federal Department of Family Services through their Healthy Marriage Initiative program.

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<sup>1</sup> © 2008 Georgia Family Council and Institute for American Families.

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