

# SCIENCE & EDUCATION Impact

Benefits from USDA/Land-Grant Partnership

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## Family Matters

Thriving under pressure.

*Violence, substance abuse, teen pregnancies, and prison time threaten more American families. Tight finances and fewer health services and community resources strain fragile households. The traditional family is changing as more grandparents, single, and foster parents are raising our children. USDA and land-grant university efforts help Americans young and old strengthen family ties, starting right at home.*

### Payoff

- **Raising the bars.** Parents in prison don't want their children to repeat their mistakes. **Tennessee State** Extension parenting classes have helped 110 male and female inmates increase involvement with their children through letter writing and verbal encouragement. Several inmates in a **Montana State** parenting program are renewing contact with their children. Inmates in **Mississippi State**, **New Hampshire**, and **Connecticut** programs are following suit.
- **Forget the rocking chair.** About 4.5 million children under the age of 18 live in grandparent-headed households. Grandparents take on a second round of child rearing because of abuse, neglect, parent incarceration, substance abuse, illness, death, or financial hardship. Grandparent caregivers often feel isolated and may have trouble navigating children's social and health services, schools, and the legal system. An **Arizona** Extension partnership center averaged 100 new contacts each month in 2003, reaching an estimated 11 percent of a county's grandparents raising grandchildren. **West Virginia** Extension's Relatives as Parents program targets the special needs of grandparents or relatives who care for children left without parents because of substance abuse or illness related to AIDS. **North Carolina A&T** features classes for limited-resource grandparents, and a **California** Extension study has increased public awareness of the challenges facing grandparents who raise their grandchildren.
- **A pregnant pause.** The United States has the highest rate of teen pregnancy and birth in the Western industrialized world. **Oklahoma State's** Teen Task Force education program to encourage postponing sexual involvement helped reduce the teen pregnancy ranking in one county from first to fourth in the state. A **Purdue**

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Extension program teaches middle and high school students about problems associated with teen pregnancy and sexual activity. As a result, the birth rate in one Indiana county dropped from more than 40 per thousand in 1988 to six per thousand in 2000. Studies of an **Alabama** 4-H abstinence program show it has lasting impact on participants. After participating, teens strongly agreed abstinence is the only way to avoid pregnancy.

- **Prenatal academy.** Low birth weight often is a problem with teen pregnancies. After a **Missouri** mentoring program for teen mothers, 14 percent of the babies had low birth weights, compared with 46 percent of babies born to teens who didn't receive mentoring. Birth weights also increased among babies whose teen moms received **West Virginia** Extension nutrition coaching. About 6 percent of the babies were low birth weight, compared with the statewide average of more than 9 percent.
- **Pulling punches.** Poor parenting skills may put children at risk for abuse or neglect. Research suggests that every \$1 spent on prevention saves \$2 on services such as health care, foster care, child welfare, juvenile facilities, and special education. **Colorado State** Extension has trained more than 1,000 professionals in 14 states to teach anger management techniques. More than 75 percent of the adults later taught by these trainers reported reducing their violence and anger levels. Of the 2,100 families who participated in an **Arizona** Extension parenting project, 94 percent of the parents later reported that the discipline they use at home with their children is less harsh. "I learned a lot and don't yell as much or hit my kids anymore," one parent said. Ninety-nine of 414 limited-resource families completing **North Carolina A&T's** stress management education program reported it helped them reduce conflicts and improve family relationships. It is estimated that this training saved \$59,400 in costs associated with absenteeism from work due to domestic violence. Studies on **Oklahoma State's** Healthy Families programs suggest that enrolled families are one-third to half as likely to mistreat their children as comparable families that haven't participated. Parenting classes speeded the return of 16 children to their own homes, saving \$29,333 per month in foster care after

their parents completed a **Georgia** course in positive parenting. **Nevada, Louisiana State, Washington State,** and **Wisconsin** are among the land-grant universities offering similar programs.

- **Changed neighbor hoodlums.** Juvenile delinquency prevention programs such as **Cornell's** Parents Involved in Education start early. At a New York elementary school where extension faculty, teachers, and students work together, discipline referrals dropped 40 percent from the previous year. Parent involvement programs are also under way through **Utah State** and **Iowa State**. School suspensions and detentions have dropped more than 75 percent, and student academic performance has increased 45 percent since the inception of a **Delaware State** school program. Thanks to **Purdue** Extension's Life After Incarceration pre-release program taught to 1300 youth offenders in 2002-2003, only 16 percent of those released during the first six months of 2003 reoffended. Long-term results show a 63 percent reduction in recidivism.
- **Payback.** Knowing how to stretch and manage family finances is always challenging, especially for families on a tight budget. Through **Texas A&M** classes, soldiers and their families at Fort Bliss and Fort Hood have developed skills for better managing their finances, saving more than \$1 million by reducing bad check fees, developing savings habits, and cutting personal debt. Twelve families in a **University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff** asset building program saved up to \$1,000 for buying or repairing a home, college education, or a small business.



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