

Project hopes to improve marriages, relationships

BY LAURA B. MARTINEZ

THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

Cameron County residents interested in improving their marital or pre-marital relationships by taking educational classes will be able to do so beginning this year.

Cameron County's Hispanic Active Relationships Project recently received a \$2.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to participate in the national "Healthy Marriage Initiative."

The Healthy Marriage Initiative strives to encourage healthy relationships.

"We are here to help the families. We are here to help the community be a healthy, safer community for Cameron County, that's really what we want," said Gloria Miranda Cavazos, program manager for Cameron County's H.A.R.P.

The project trains community leaders and couples in how to use educational courses to teach couples, either married or dating, how to

improve and maintain healthy relationships.

The educational classes will be taught throughout the county and are free.

"We are thrilled that our efforts in Texas have resulted in an opportunity for Cameron County to build great marriages and therefore strengthen families," Kelly Simpson, founder of the H.A.R.P. project and director of Active Relationships, said in a news release. "There is so much to know about creating a successful marriage and unfortunately most of us never had education in these skills, nor did our parents or their parents. We are just expected to know how."

The educational courses will be taught in a classroom-type setting and the couples will participate in training exercises.

A pilot program was conducted in the county at the beginning of last year and the turnout and results showed that a program such as H.A.R.P. was needed in the area, Cavazos said.

"Brownsville was one of the best in the state" with effectiveness rates Cavazos said, considering the challenges in the area.

"The culture here is very different. ... I had a lot of challenges, especially with the 'machismo' attitude," Cavazos said.

Cameron County was among 1,600 applicants for the grant money from across the nation and was one of 124 to receive the money.

About 10 couples will begin training on how to teach the classes this month. Officials hope to be able to offer the first class sometime in February. The educational classes, which are not counseling sessions, are free and will be open only to Cameron County residents.

For more information, call Gloria Miranda Cavazos at (956) 544-7165, or visit the project Web site at www.HARPCC.com

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