

# SPOTLIGHT: *Celebrating Families!*<sup>™</sup>



*Celebrating Families!* is an evidence-based, skills-building program designed for families who have been impacted by addiction. This program uses an intergenerational approach, engaging parents with substance use disorders, their children through age 17, and the children's caregivers. The program's focus is to prevent children's future addiction while also improving their mental and physical health. The *Celebrating Families!* curriculum is coordinated by the National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACoA), and has been implemented in over 100 jurisdictions.

## How *Celebrating Families!* Works

*Celebrating Families!* is a 16-week curriculum built on a cognitive behavioral therapy model. These 16 sessions are detailed in a five-volume set, which includes fully-scripted lessons for each age group and provides background information on related topics, such as learning disabilities, domestic violence, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.

The program is intended for 5 to 10 families, with as many as 25 to 30 people participating each week. Each session begins with a family meal. Afterward, family members break into age groups for a 90-minute skill-building lesson led by a group facilitator. At the end of each session, family members reconnect and participate in an activity as a family that builds on the skills learned during the break-out groups. Themes for the sessions include: nutrition, communication, anger management, making healthy choices, and healthy relationships.

Before initiating the program, on-site coordinators are encouraged to provide program staff and volunteers with complete training, which is provided by NACoA. Program coordinators are also urged to implement the curriculum with fidelity and to implement data gathering methods at the outset to measure the program's effectiveness; NACoA provides a set of evaluation tools to help sites with this task.

## Building *Celebrating Families!*

This program was created in 2003 for the Family Treatment Drug Court in Santa Clara, CA, at the request

By "going out into communities, learning about communities, tailoring the training to specific community needs, we really have the potential to effect larger community change and really end the cycle of addiction in families."

– Rachel Garner, Trainer,  
*Celebrating Families!*

of then-Supervising Judge P. Leonard Edwards (ret.) with funding support by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Building on its early success in the court, the program was then piloted at three community-based sites throughout the city—Friends Outside of Santa Clara County, which assists people who are or who have been incarcerated and their families; EMQ-Families First, a children's mental health organization; and ARH's Parisi House on the Hill, a residential treatment facility for women with children under five. The early adoption of the program in diverse settings helped to demonstrate its adaptability and utility.

In 2007, *Celebrating Families!* was acquired by NACoA, which promotes and disseminates this program to interested policymakers throughout the country. It has been implemented in more than 100 locations in the U.S. and Canada, and is available in English and Spanish. Program coordinators have also created a version for Native American communities.

## Eligibility Criteria

The program model is intended for families in which one or both parents have a substance use disorder. Program participants include the parents, children up through age 17, and the children's caregivers.

Different jurisdictions have implemented this program in different contexts and with different sponsoring organizations. Some jurisdictions have connected the program to an existing drug court program, so that in

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order to be eligible for the program, one of the parents must be a drug court participant. In other jurisdictions, the curriculum is used by faith-based organizations, residential and outpatient treatment facilities, and social service agencies. In each location, on-site program coordinators identify selection criteria that are catered to the needs of their community.

### Demonstrating Success

*Celebrating Families!* has a proven track record of success, and is listed on SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs & Practices. Independent evaluators have assessed the program's effectiveness in several different locations. Key findings include positive improvements in family cohesion and communication and parent involvement and efficacy; these positive results have also been found in the Spanish-language version of the curriculum.

*Celebrating Families!* may play an important role in the successful reunification of families. Research suggests that Family Drug Courts (FDC) that include evidence-based parenting programs, such as *Celebrating Families!*, may offer a timelier route to reunification for families in the child welfare. FDC participants were nearly twice as likely to reunify, as compared to a matched control group, and they did so hundreds of days more quickly.

### Stakeholders & Partners

NACoA works closely with jurisdictions that plan to implement the *Celebrating Families!* curriculum in

“The timing of the curriculum for children ages 0 to 3 is so important right now given the opioid crisis in the country. We need to focus on infant mental health and this curriculum really brings it all home.”

– Rachel Garner, Trainer,  
*Celebrating Families!*

order to provide training to program staff and help develop systems that will allow for evaluation of the program. On-site coordinators may choose to partner with any variety of local agencies and organizations who may have an interest in the program, and they are encouraged to identify and engage these stakeholders when appropriate.

### The Future of Celebrating Families!

Program administrators recently created a supplemental curriculum for children ages 0 to 3 in order to provide opportunities for parents and families to learn and practice skills that support attachment and foster communication from the beginning of their children's lives. Early childhood development research supports intervening as early as possible because children of parents with substance use disorders are at especially high risk of developmental, educational, and psychosocial issues. This new supplement allows on-site coordinators to integrate even the youngest children into a comprehensive family support program.

### Resources & References

NACoA's program website: <http://nacoa.org/celebrating-families>.

*Celebrating Families!* website: <http://www.celebratingfamilies.net>.

SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs & Practices:  
<http://nrepp.samhsa.gov>.

Jody Brook, Becci A. Akin, Margaret H. Lloyd, and Yueqi Yan, *Family drug court, targeted parent training and family reunification: Did this enhanced service strategy make a difference?*, *Juvenile & Family Court Journal* 66:2 (2015).

Karol Kumpfer, Final Outcome Evaluation May 2007: Report for Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health (May 2007), [www.celebratingfamilies.net/PDF/FinalOutcomeEvaluation\\_LutraGroup.pdf](http://www.celebratingfamilies.net/PDF/FinalOutcomeEvaluation_LutraGroup.pdf).

Shirley Sparks, Rosemary Tisch, Mary Gardner, & John Sparks, ¡Celebrado Familias! An innovative approach for Spanish speaking families at high risk for substance abuse disorders (February 8, 2011), [www.celebratingfamilies.net/PDF/evaluationReport\\_2011.pdf](http://www.celebratingfamilies.net/PDF/evaluationReport_2011.pdf).