

Bush plan on marriage called into question

By John Johnston
The Cincinnati Enquirer

A Bush administration proposal to spend \$1.5 billion to promote "healthy marriages," especially among low-income couples, oversimplifies a complex problem, the leader of a local social-service agency says.

The proposal, reported Wednesday in the *New York Times*, would provide training to help couples develop the interpersonal skills to sustain their marriages. Some analysts see the proposal as a means to please conservatives who want the president to take a firm stand

against same-sex marriage.

Wade F. Horn, assistant secretary of health and human services for children and families, noted in the *Times* report that children raised by parents in stable, married families do better physically and mentally and are less likely to be poor.

Gwen L. Robinson doesn't dispute that. But the president and CEO of the Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency (CAA) says economic factors, rather than lack of interpersonal skills, often play a larger role in whether a low-income couple gets married and

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stays that way.

Her agency works with thousands of low-income people locally, including couples who struggle to stay together. Often, Robinson says, men who don't have the financial wherewithal to support their families avoid marriage because it becomes more difficult for the family to receive government support, including health benefits.

"We're finding in almost 80 percent of the cases, (fathers) are not working or working at very minimal wages," Robinson says. "Therefore, they're not offering a lot (financially)." That, in turn, can lead the wife to push the husband away.

The solution, Robinson says: "Let's get (job) training and get (fathers) into jobs where they can take care of their families."

CAA's fatherhood initiative incorporates the agency's Head Start program to encourage fathers to become engaged in their children's lives. In the summer, for instance, fathers officiate and coach at their children's soccer games.

"You'd be amazed to see the mothers coming out. It's like a family affair. From that, we get men ... into our job training program."



Enquirer file/GLENN HARTONG

Gwen Robinson says money matters in marriage.

E-mail jjohnston@enquirer.com