



## Stable families or cookery classes – what’s the priority?

While the DCSF has recently announced £55 million of new funding for improving the teaching of cookery, it pays scant regards to relationships education which could help stabilise families across Britain.<sup>1</sup> In spite of their words to the contrary, and their “Relationship Summit” in December<sup>2</sup>, the evidence is that DCSF put far more resources into cookery classes than helping prevent relationship breakdown.

A major conference took place in Marriage Week on Relationship Education. Both Maria Miller (Shadow Minister for the Family) and Annette Brookes (Lib Dem spokesperson on Children, Young People and Families) outlined their support and commitment to working with the voluntary sector to raise the game of mums and dads everywhere by providing better access to the available services. (A spokesperson from the government had, of course, been invited to the conference but on the day said that they would not be able to attend.)

The conference outlined the encouraging findings from recent research, and the scale of work already being done in the UK despite the virtual absence of government support<sup>3</sup>.

Marriage Week has been the opportunity to highlight other key issues for every tax payer. Family Breakdown is costing £37bn a year<sup>4</sup> – yet spending on prevention is negligible! £37bn would buy RBS, Lloyds Banking Group and Barclays leaving enough change to pick up M&S and British Airways. “In *Go Right/Go Wrong* we recognise that lone parents and their children bear the brunt of the costs of breakdown. However we also note that taxpayers foot much of the financial bill and therefore the government must take support for relationships more seriously,” said Michael Trend, Executive Director of the Relationships Foundation.

When couples do commit themselves to each other in Marriage, they are then penalised by the tax system, paying substantially more than if they lived in Europe reports CARE<sup>5</sup>. MP’s from every side of the political system agree it is wrong, but seem unable to convince the government to make the changes. “Clearly they need to be able to fund increased education in Egg boiling!” remarked Dave Percival, Coordinator of Marriage Week, wryly. “The DCSF Relationship Summit in December focussed almost entirely on how to help couples and their children separate with less impact. And whilst that is valuable, it was entirely silent on the subject of preventing breakdown, and helping couples actually achieve their aspirations”, he added.

Yet the voluntary sector and those working in the field know what works, and are constantly innovating with new approaches and programmes. Marriage Week has seen the launch of a new online Inventory, Couple Check-up, to enable couples to access the best research based guidance directly themselves.” *‘We liked the fact that the report was tailored to our situation, we’re expecting a baby soon, and this was reflected in some of the areas like roles and responsibilities which are changing for us at present’*, remarked one couple who recently tried the new system. Couples can even try the Inventory for 40% discount if they do it before Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> as a special discount for Marriage Week<sup>6</sup>. Other

initiatives this week have included a new website for those planning marriage ([www.prepareformarriage.org.uk](http://www.prepareformarriage.org.uk)), new programmes for Marriage Preparation, and advice to churches to improve their service to young couples who want to marry<sup>7</sup>.

A broadminded attitude amongst the young towards other people's decisions about marriage shouldn't be mistaken for a modern indifference to getting married. 'What we have in the UK today are "traditional" personal aspirations on the one hand, with liberalized social norms on the other', commented Anastasia de Waal, Director of Family and Education at Civitas<sup>8</sup>. 'In short, it's a case of "I do - but I won't judge what you do".'

"Couples still aspire to marriage, and all the benefits it brings," said Dave Percival, Coordinator of Marriage Week, "and the week is all about encouraging married couples everywhere to enjoy their marriage, and make it the best it can be. It's just a shame that the Government seems so unwilling to support the work needed to make the aspiration of a long term stable couple relationship an achievable goal for everyone. They give us all the right words, but their actions and priorities show what they really believe."

ENDS

### Notes for Editors

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn\\_id=2009\\_0024](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2009_0024) for announcement from DCSF

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn\\_id=2008\\_0293](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2008_0293) or contact Marriage Week for links to various press comment at the time

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.2-in-2-1.co.uk/images/mwuk/Press%20release%20conf09.pdf> for Press Release on Conference and associated notes.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.2-in-2-1.co.uk/images/mwuk/Press%20release%2037bn.pdf> . For full details from Relationships Foundation and supporting analysis see <http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org/download.php?id=246>

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.2-in-2-1.co.uk/images/mwuk/Press%20release%20tax.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.2-in-2-1.co.uk/images/mwuk/Press%20release%20CC09.pdf> for details

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.2-in-2-1.co.uk/images/mwuk/Press%20release%200109.pdf> for further details

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.2-in-2-1.co.uk/images/mwuk/Press%20release%20Civitas.pdf>