

media release

8<sup>th</sup> February 2010

## Built to Last

### The case for Couple Relationship Education

In the first of our Marriage Week press releases, the Relationships Foundation is calling on the government to invest £10 million to support the voluntary sector in providing relationships education for couples. Too many couples *slide* into relationships without ever actually *deciding* to be together and this has both public and private consequences. *Built to Last* sets out the case for Couple Relationship Education which helps people work through issues before deciding to commit, making the relationship more likely to succeed. New figures to be released during Marriage Week will show that taxpayers spent over £40 billion last year on failed relationships.(1) Many excellent organisations offer support for those couples experiencing difficulty, but there is very little work done *in advance* to prevent couples reaching the point where they need counselling.

Both the Government's family green paper *Support for All* and the Conservative's draft manifesto have highlighted the need for more relationship support. Ed Balls and David Cameron seem to agree that more work is needed in this area. In response, the Relationships Foundation is today launching *Built to Last*, a pamphlet setting out clearly the case for Couple Relationship Education (CRE). It is based on our earlier substantial research report *Building Strong Foundations* and calls on the Government to invest in voluntary organisations which offer relationship education to couples.

#### *Sliding v Deciding*

How relationships form is critical to how they function. Options can be curtailed even before a clear decision is made, because couples *slide* through, rather than *decide* upon, relationship transitions (eg, sexual involvement, pregnancy and cohabitation). Sliding results in relationship inertia, often meaning couples remain in unfulfilling, or even unsafe relationships. CRE seeks to teach individuals to slow down in relationships; to actively and self-consciously make decisions before committing too far and losing choices.

CRE is a simple solution to a growing and painful problem. It is not rocket science, nor will it save every family, but it does work. Relationships are vital to our wellbeing – increasing health, happiness and life expectancy. But relationships are fragile, easily broken and under pressure in our busy individualistic society. When they go wrong the private and public costs are high. And – as is so often the case – prevention is better than cure. Ten hours of training and support could make the difference between success and failure for some couples. When it comes to one of the biggest decisions of our lives – who we want to spend our lives with – we are often ill-prepared. Only a quarter of those getting married each year receive any form of marriage preparation, but most only meet for a few hours to discuss the marriage ceremony itself. The figures for those cohabiting are harder to obtain, but are certainly lower.

The most comprehensive review of CRE to date found that, 'the average person who participated in a premarital prevention program was better off after the program than 79% of the people who did not receive a similar educational experience.' (2)

Researcher Peter Lynas commented: 'It's basic common sense. Most people go to pre-natal classes before they have a baby because it is a new experience for them. It should be the same for couple relationships. So many people don't have a model of a stable couple relationship. At a course they can discuss their expectations, whether they hope to have children, what to do when they argue and talk about money. This forces people to make conscious decisions rather than sliding into situations.'

Peter Lynas continues: 'Relationships Foundation would like to see more government investment in third sector organizations so that CRE is made more widely available. The government picks up the tab when things go wrong – a bill of over £40billion each year. It seems wiser to invest a little in preventing problems arising.'

ENDS

For more information please contact Peter Lynas at:

p.lynas@relationshipsfoundation.org

01223 341286

07899 898066

**NOTES TO EDITORS:** ☒

*Built to Last* is available at <http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org/download.php?id=257>

*Building Strong Foundations* is available at <http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org/download.php?id=251>

Marriage Weeks runs from 8<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> February 2010. Marriage is one of a number of key family relationships which can increase wellbeing and reduce long term public spending. Despite the continual flow of family policy announcements, the political parties' thinking on the family remains too small. The Relationships Foundation will be issuing a series of press releases for Marriage Week ultimately calling on all politicians to commit to 'family proofing' all policy.

The Relationships Foundation, established in 1993, is a Cambridge-based independent think tank seeking a better connected society. It studies the effect that culture, business and government have on relationships. It proposes new ideas for strengthening social connections, campaigns on issues where relationships are being undermined, and trains and equips people to think relationally for themselves.

1. *Counting the Cost of Family Failure*, Relationships Foundation, Briefing Note 2 will become available on our website during Marriage Week. For information on last year's cost of relationship breakdown see *When Relationships Go Right/Go Wrong*. Available at <http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org/download.php?id=246>

2. Carroll and Doherty, 'Evaluating the Effectiveness of Premarital Prevention Programs: A Meta-analytic Review of Outcome Research' in *Family Relations*, 2003, Vol 52, No 2, 105-118.

The Relationships Foundation, 3 Hooper Street, Cambridge, CB1 2NZ  
[www.relationshipsfoundation.org](http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org)