

**Senate Community Affairs Committee**  
**ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
**SOCIAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO**  
**2013-14 Additional Estimates Hearings**

**Outcome Number: 1**

**Question No: 261**

**Topic:** Marriage Education Vouchers

**Hansard Page:** Written

**Senator Moore** asked:

Can the department provide information on the research that was done into the effectiveness of marriage education vouchers in keeping couples together? By whom was this research undertaken and what did it say?

**Answer:**

The effectiveness of relationship education and counselling has been a focus of research both in Australia and internationally. Research particularly focuses on relationship education because of its preventative role. Research consistently shows improvements in couples' communication and relationship skills over the short to medium-term. Research also indicates a lack of awareness in the broader community of the benefits from marriage and relationship education.<sup>1</sup>

In 2001, the former Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) conducted the Pre-marriage Education Pilot Project which trialled a \$200 pre-marriage education voucher scheme in Launceston, Tasmania and Perth, Western Australia. An evaluation of the pilot identified that as a result of attending a marriage and relationship education activity almost two thirds (63 per cent) of couples said it had improved their communication skills. The vast majority said the activity was useful (90 per cent), and there was a high degree of satisfaction with the content of the activities with 86 per cent to 95 per cent saying they were 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied.

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<sup>1</sup> W Kim Halford, Alf Lizzio, Keitha L Wilson & Stefano Occhipinti, "Does working at your marriage help? Couple relationship self-regulation and satisfaction in the first 4 years of marriage", *Journal of Family Psychology*, 2007, vol. 21, No 2, 185-194; Robyn Parker, "The effectiveness of marriage and relationship education", *Family Matters*, 2007, no. 77, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne; W Kim Halford, Howard J Markman & Scott Stanley, "Strengthening couples' relationships with education: Social policy and public health perspectives", *Journal of Family Psychology*, 2008, vol. 22, no. 3, 497-505; Robyn Parker, "Recent Progress in marriage and relationship education in Australia", *AFRC Briefing*, No 3, 2007; W Kim Halford & Michele Simons, "Couple relationship education in Australia", *Family Process*, vol. 44, No 2, 2005; Elizabeth van Acker, *The problem of marriage*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008; Donovan Research, *Pre-marriage education pilot project*, Department of Family and Community Services, 2001.