Workshop 1E
Beyond the T4 Cell Count: The Far-reaching Impact of HIV/AIDS

Moderator/Panelists: Rev. Carol Moulton, MA, JD, Management Analyst, ACF, Washington, D.C.

Akilah Ferrell, MPH, Project Director, Building Strong Families, Atlanta, GA

Dr. Tricia Bent-Goodley gave an overview of HIV. Adult onset is generally not recognized until 10 years or more after infection. AIDS is a global epidemic, claiming more than 25 million lives around the world, making it the world’s leading cause of death.

Today 1.7 million people in the U.S. are infected with HIV (550,000 have already died). Approximately 25% of those infected with HIV do not know they are infected. AIDS diagnoses have been on the rise since 2001. People of color represent the majority of new AIDS cases (71%) and those living with AIDS (64%). African Americans have the highest rate of AIDS among all racial and ethnic groups. HIV is the fourth leading cause of death for Black men and third for Black women, age 25-44.

Akilah Ferrell discussed Building Strong Families (BSF), a program for couples that teaches how to begin and sustain a healthy marriage. It includes family support services (link to services like employment, credit repair and money management, and substance abuse treatment); marriage and relationship education and skills; and family coordinators who assess needs and help sustained support.

Over three years, 1200 couples have been recruited into BSF. The initial 22 week program, now condensed to 12 weeks, has a new HIV prevention component. BSF clients are disproportionately affected by HIV, specifically African Americans under 35, low income, and with a high jail rate.

A new program component, BSF PLUS, is looking at the experience of delivering an HIV/AIDS safer sex curriculum to expectant couples. It also will provide an environment for couples to discuss safer sex practices together. Among the 43 couples who have participated in BSF PLUS, 97% want to know more about HIV prevention; only 3% always use condoms; and 86% reported cheating on their current partner. From this study, some questions have been recognized for further research.