

# Letter from the Executive Director

It has been 10 years since First Things First (FTF) completed its baseline research on the attitudes and behaviors of Hamilton County residents concerning marriage and the family.

I am pleased to present to you **The 2007 State of the Family**, which includes many significant findings from our most recent research documenting the past 10 years. In addition to research commissioned by FTF and conducted by the Barna Research Group and Wirthlin Worldwide/Harris Interactive, **The 2007 State of the Family** also includes significant findings from national research conducted by The National Marriage Project, The National Fatherhood Initiative, The Institute for American Values, The Brookings Institute and others.

Because First Things First's mission is to strengthen families, we believe it is important to provide you with valuable insights into a number of issues that impact the family.

According to Kay Hymowitz, in her book, ***Marriage and Caste in America: Separate and Unequal Families in a Post-Marital Age***:

*"The breakdown of marriage in the United States – which began about 40 years ago as divorce and out of wedlock birthrates soared – threatens America's future. It is turning us into a nation of separate and unequal families. It has become clear that family breakdown lies at the heart of our nation's most obstinate social problems, especially poverty and inequality. To put it more broadly, there is no way to attack these worrisome economic trends without tackling culture – the system of beliefs, values and practices that help us define and live a good life."*

For ten years, First Things First has worked to provide information based on extensive, ongoing research, to equip couples and families with the necessary tools to build strong marriages and families and ultimately change the culture and strengthen our community.

From the research we can tell that people are striving to have healthy, long-lasting marriages and family relationships. Most people can tell you what they need to do to reach their goals; however, a disconnect is evident when you look at people's behavior. It is similar to what we see when it comes to exercise and diet or smoking cessation. People know what they need to do, but are not sure they are quite ready to make the commitment and expend the energy it will take to accomplish their goal.

Research scientists from all over the globe including Drs. John Gottman, David Popenoe, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, Scott Stanley, Howard Markman, and many more, are finding that strong and enduring marriages are not only important, they are vital to societal wellbeing. Marriage provides a framework in which we learn and grow, commit ourselves to the care and nurture of children and each other, and teach future generations how to honor commitment, work through challenges, share intimate joy with another person, and work together to reach common goals.

**The 2007 State of the Family** will give you an up-to-date look at what local residents believe about the state of marriage, fatherhood, and family. The sector recommendations are included to provide citizens with specific action steps which can be implemented throughout the community. The vast majority of people in Hamilton County believe that marriage is a lifelong commitment and that a sound marriage provides the best environment for raising healthy and well-balanced children.

This report highlights the fact that there is work that needs to be done in order to equip families in our community. Fathers are not connecting with their children, more young couples choose to live together before marriage, the majority of residents feel marriage is weaker today than it was thirty years ago, and many parents are under-involved with their children. In addition, there is cultural misinformation which serves to undermine the hopes of many in our community for having a happy and successful marriage and family.

We at First Things First envision a bright future for our community and the families that live here. We know that by providing resources and teaching skills we can help couples, parents and singles to build strong foundations on which their families can grow. Changing attitudes will not happen overnight. But we understand that if we can have an impact on the attitudes and behaviors of Hamilton County residents, we can be a catalyst for lasting, positive change in our community and for future generations to come.

