

The Postdocs of Healthy Relationships Utah

Kay Bradford

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Healthy Relationships Utah, directed by Dr. Brian Higginbotham, offers free research-based relationship education courses throughout the state. Meet the three Postdoctoral Fellows who work with Dr. Kay Bradford to analyze the processes and impacts of these classes!

Dr. J. Scott Crapo:

I am Dr. J. Scott Crapo. I got my PhD right here at USU, and my favorite superpower comes from Michael Vey, where one of the characters can remove people's pain. Although I cannot directly remove people's pain, the focus of my research is to improve relationships, which is similar. Literally, even, as the touch of a close romantic partner has been shown to reduce people's response to pain.

I focus on flourishing couple relationships across the lifespan—within the context of family development. With nearly 50% of all marriages ending in divorce, and only an estimated 48.1% of intact relationships flourishing, I am deeply invested in understanding what can be done to support and create flourishing relationships. My recent work includes the publication of *Multidimensional Family Development Theory*, which is an update of that major family theory. I also study couple relationships within families.

I am the evaluator of Dr. Kay Bradford's federal grant, which teaches relationship skills to at-risk youth. Our data show the youth improve in their confidence to have successful relationships, and their ability to spot warning signs of unhealthy relationships (e.g., avoid coercion).

What is more, the youth report that the intervention provides valuable information, and helps the youth feel safe, be engaged, and open up—to teachers, peers, and parents.

Dr. Olena Kopystynska:

As a child, I was a natural observer of human behavior. I wondered why some family friends could make their marriage work and others endlessly complained about their relationship. I also wondered why despite challenges with their spouse, some adults could embrace their parental responsibilities, and others were simply too exhausted to go to their children's school events, for example. My curiosity quickly turned into a career path. As an undergraduate student at Arizona State University, I became involved in numerous research projects related to these interests. My engagement in these projects left me with a desire to formulate and answer my own research questions.

This post-doc position gives me an opportunity to do just that. I am particularly interested in understanding the extent to which parents' interpersonal behaviors affect their own relationship and parenting. In a recent study that was published at *Journal of Family Issues*, my colleagues and I focused on examining the path to relationship instability among remarried couples. About 40% of all marriages are remarriages, which are less stable compared to first marriages. We found that the positive aspects tend to diminish and negative aspects tend to increase over time. To prevent divorce, our suggestion for stepfamily intervention programs is to consider including a discussion of problems that come, and how to effectively address them. I am grateful for the opportunity to be involved in research that could potentially help families improve their lives.

Dr. Josh Turner:

Hi. My name is Josh Turner. I received my PhD in Human Development and Family Sciences from Mississippi State University in 2017. Prior to joining the HRU team, I worked at Mississippi State for 10 years. Before moving to Mississippi, I lived in South Dakota where I completed my Master's degree and worked for South Dakota State University Extension. One fact about me is that I have lived in 7 states during my lifetime.

I report outcomes for Healthy Relationships Utah. Since 2012, we have educated **31,511 adults**, and **41,306 teens**! Courses include *How to Avoid Falling for a*

Jerk(ette), and *Parenting the Love and Logic Way*^R.

During my graduate studies, my main focus was Aging and Adult Development, and my dissertation focused on food access for seniors in rural areas. Since joining the HRU team, I have branched out to concentrate on family science and relationship education. My current research focuses on fatherhood education, divorce education, and remarriage and stepfamily dynamics. Our work on remarriage and stepfamilies seems particularly timely, considering stepfamilies currently represent the fastest growing family form in the U.S.

In addition, I teach courses for the HDFS department. I have a passion for teaching and working with students and I have found these experiences to be very rewarding. My time at USU has been a great experience and I look forward to making further contributions to the HRU initiative.