



## American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy Research & Education Foundation

### *Firmitas per Familiam – Strength through Family*

*“The wider paradigm of relationships and family transcends old group definitions. The discovery of our connections to all other men, women, and children joins us to another family. Indeed, seeing ourselves as a planetary family struggling to solve its problems, rather than as assorted people and nations assessing blame or exporting solutions, could be the ultimate shift in perspective.”*

*— Marilyn Ferguson*

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#### ***Societal Challenges, Professional Help***

**M**ental health issues manifest in many forms—the teenager suffering from an eating disorder, a neighbor battling depression, a loved one suffering from an anxiety disorder, a friend dealing with drug or alcohol addiction, an abused spouse or the returning veteran seeking support for post traumatic stress disorder. Mental disorders do not discriminate; they exist in all communities and impact families regardless of gender, ethnicity or socio-economic status. Fortunately, for those in need, there are professionals who have dedicated their lives to positively impacting the lives of others. One need only consider the shocking statistic, revealing one in six adults experience symptoms of mental illness, to realize the gravity of the situation and the value of the Marriage and Family Therapist.

#### ***The Field of Marriage & Family Therapy***

The Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) responds to modern societal problems like cyber-bullying, domestic violence, anxiety disorders, and the abuse of prescription drugs by educating, treating and delivering cost-effective therapeutic solutions to help those in need. Marriage and Family Therapists recognize that mental health issues are often born and perpetuated within a complex system of relationships: family, friends, colleagues, and the rest of the world. Relational problems affect everyone and often have an adverse impact on the personal and work environments, resulting in loss of productivity, anxiety and depression, often leading to alcohol and drug abuse. Recognizing the limits of traditional treatment and its emphasis on the individual, Marriage and Family Therapists utilize a systems approach to treatment that values individual context and personal environment. By treating clients in the context of their own environments, and treating all factors holistically through a systemic, rather than reductionist approach, MFTs are improving the care continuum, producing better client outcomes and rebuilding strong families.

## Case in Point

### Laurelle Myhra, PhD, LMFT



Dr. Myhra is a member of the Red Lake Ojibwe Nation. She is a licensed marriage and family therapist who heads the Counseling Clinic at the Native American Community Clinic, an urban integrated care site. She is also an assistant professor in the marriage and family master's program at St. Mary's University in Minneapolis.

Dr. Myhra credits the Minority Fellowship Program for the strong network and connections she has established. She is committed to addressing health disparities through her work as a clinician, teacher and researcher. She specializes in the treatment of traumatic stress and substance abuse disorders in Native American families. Her therapeutic approach is to privilege Indigenous knowledge and draw on the existing strengths of the families and communities.

***“I am very grateful for the Minority Fellowship, because it allowed me to present my research at conferences I normally would not have been able to attend. My understanding of health in Native communities was greatly increased by attending these conferences and by meeting exceptional researchers in the field.”***

Marriage and Family Therapists' knowledge of the human condition enables them to shape their therapy modalities and provide unique treatment plans that have an economic impact on the client, their family and the realized cost of care. With three times more coursework in systems than any other profession, skilled therapists deliver solutions in an efficient and cost-effective way and reduce the higher costs associated with institutional treatment. Research and evidence-based studies confirm:

- 👑 Individuals, couples and families in therapy make fewer physician visits, resulting in reduced healthcare costs.
- 👑 Marriage and family therapy can reduce the utilization of outpatient medical services.
- 👑 Therapy can reduce client relapses and institutional readmissions.
- 👑 Average savings on medical costs can exceed 20%, after subtracting the cost of therapy.
- 👑 Marriage and family therapy can decrease absenteeism and improve job performance.
- 👑 The holistic approach to systemic therapy strengthens the client's support system and positively impacts individual outcomes.

**Marriage and Family Therapists** provide effective care to people with a wide range of difficulties within the system of close relationships and supportive context.

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|---------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 👑 Depression        | 👑 Chronic physical illness | 👑 Alcohol abuse           |
| 👑 Anxiety disorders | 👑 Psychosexual problems    | 👑 Attachment issues       |
| 👑 ADHD              | 👑 Domestic Violence        | 👑 Eating disorders        |
| 👑 PTSD              | 👑 Schizophrenia            | 👑 Child abuse and neglect |

# AAMFT

To distinguish the field and strengthen its professionalism, in 1942 leading practitioners formed a national organization of researchers and mental health professionals committed to the prevention and management of mental health disorders and other related issues. Today, this organization is known as the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) and represents the interests of over 50,000 marriage and family therapists in the United States, Canada and abroad. AAMFT remains the world's oldest and largest organization addressing systemic and relational issues facing marriages, families, and individuals.

Dedicated to providing excellence in care, the association facilitates research, theory development and education. AAMFT develops standards for graduate education and training, clinical supervision, professional ethics and the clinical practice of marriage and family therapy, with an annual national training conference each fall, as well as a week-long series of continuing education institutes in the summer and an online institute for continuing education.

The AAMFT is proud to publish the scholarly research publication, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, and provide news about the field in *Family Therapy* magazine, as well as a variety of brochures and pamphlets that inform the public about the field of marriage and family therapy. AAMFT also offers a range of professional and practice development products, including videotapes, books and brochures.

## ***AAMFT: History of Achievement***

1942: A national organization is founded by industry pioneers to strengthen the field's professionalism

1947: Incorporated as the American Association of Marriage Counselors with the purpose to produce research and education in marriage and family systems (modern day AAMFT Research and Education Foundation)

1964: First Marriage and Family Therapists license issued in California

1974: The modern day American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) is established to promote the profession of marriage and family systems practitioners

1978: Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) established

1992: Marriage and Family Therapists are recognized as core mental health providers

2007: AAMFT receives a grant to establish AAMFT Minority Fellowship Program

2009: AAMFT achieves licensure for Marriage and Family Therapist in 50 states

2010: AAMFT secures a job classification for Marriage and Family Therapist with the Department of Veterans Affairs

## AAMFT Foundation

The AAMFT Research & Education Foundation was established in 1947 as an aligned partner of AAMFT.

*The AAMFT Research and Education Foundation exists to fund systemic and relational research, scholarship, and education in an effort to support and enhance the practice of systemic and relational therapies; advance the health care continuum; and improve client outcomes.*

With the purpose to procure funding for essential education, critical research, and programs that elevate the awareness, understanding and value of marriage and family therapy, the Foundation was formed exclusively to apply its income and all or part of its principal for research and educational purposes that strengthen marriage and family life. The Foundation exists:

- 👑 To fund education programs for people in the profession of marriage and family therapy, thereby enhancing their skills;
- 👑 To publish or distribute educational and scientific material relating to marriage and family therapy, policy and research;
- 👑 To participate in and/or fund scientific research in the area of marriage and family therapy and make its findings available to the public;
- 👑 To fund policy related activities including research studies, seminars, conferences and projects designed to promote policy that strengthen marriage and family life;
- 👑 To provide scholarships and financial assistance for people interested in advancing their knowledge of marriage and family therapy;
- 👑 To do everything necessary, legal and proper for the advancement of scientific or educational purposes, consistent with the public interest; and
- 👑 To generate financial commitments in the form of gifts, grants, bequests, etc. to fulfill the charge of the Foundation

Historically, as an entity with modest resources, the Foundation has partnered with AAMFT and academic communities to identify grant making opportunities for emerging researchers, trainers and educators, and innovative contributors who benefit the field through their work. In recent years, the Foundation has supported hundreds of deserving professionals through various grants and awards. The Foundation's contributions to the advancement of research through financial awards illustrates its past success and promise for the future.

*A sampling of AAMFT Foundation awards includes the following:*

*AAMFT Foundation Research Awards*

**Dissertation Award/Master Thesis Award** recognizes scholarly achievement by recent graduates whose research studies related to couples and family therapy or family therapy training. Over the past two decades, the Foundation supported 27 people with this award.

**Graduate Student Research Award** honors graduate students with a financial award to offset research costs. The Foundation has supported 22 graduate students with this award.

*AAMFT Foundation Education Awards*

To further the recruitment, training and retention of professionals in the field of marriage and family therapy, the Foundation provides stipends, scholarships, and supports a fellowship program to recognize outstanding professionals in the field.

**Minority Fellowship Program** is a professional training appointment into a community of other students and practitioners or practitioner/researcher professionals who hold similar professional interests. More than an award, MFP helps facilitate leadership development and provide professional guidance with the aim of deepening the skills sets and knowledge base of the Fellows in areas related to minority mental health research and services. The AAMFT Foundation has supported 89 Fellows with an average of \$20,000 Fellowship.

**Minority Supervision Stipend** supports outstanding minority supervisors-in-training with a financial award. This award was first given in 1995, when 19 deserving individuals received it. Since 1995, the Foundation has supported 48 professionals with this award.

**Master’s Student Minority Scholarship** confers fellowships to minority students in graduate studies in Master’s or PDI programs in marriage and family therapy. 19 students have received this award.

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*Case in Point*



***Ruben Parra-Cardona, PhD, LMFT***

Dr. Parra-Cardona is an Associate Professor in the program of couple and family therapy at Michigan State University and a recipient of the AAMFT Foundation’s Dissertation Award. Dr. Parra-Cardona says that receiving this grant allowed him to focus his research on parenting with Latino populations. He was able to establish a federally funded program with grants from the NIMH and NIDA to conduct research with underserved Latino populations. His clinical experience has included the provision of services to street children engaged in drug trafficking and prostitution, victims of sexual abuse and violence, adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system, and adult federal probationers convicted for drug trafficking.

## Embracing the Past & Preparing for the Future

Today, there is a reawakening and precipitous change occurring within the Foundation. Responding to the growing demand for evidence-based research, education and global outreach within the Marriage and Family Therapy community, the Foundation's focus is shifting from a reactive grant-making entity to a proactive catalyst for industry advancement. To facilitate this paradigm shift, Foundation leadership is committed and resolute in its charge of:

- 👑 Providing all constituents with a clear purpose and value proposition of the Foundation
- 👑 Increasing the financial resources of the Foundation by pursuing stakeholder investment
- 👑 Funding priority projects that produce measurable results and quantifiable return
- 👑 Prudently and transparently managing the Foundation's resources and reporting success

As a grant-making partner of the AAMFT, the Foundation works closely with the leadership of its parent organization to prioritize funding opportunities that deliver the greatest value to the field of Marriage and Family Therapy. By clarifying this relationship, constituents quickly recognize the primary goal of the Foundation, which is to increase fiscal resources by building value-based relationships and facilitating financial support from AAMFT members, grateful clients, industry supporters, foundations and all other stakeholders.

As AAMFT and its Foundation prepare for their future, they remain unwavering in their commitment to the vitality and long-term success of the mental health industry. Aligned in mission and vision, AAMFT and the Foundation see new and exciting opportunities on the horizon for the organization and the global Marriage and Family Therapy community.

### Research

Leading the dialogue on marriage and family therapy requires quantifiable data. Evidence-based research is of critical importance to maintaining relevance within the care continuum and in publicly advocating the merits of therapy to legislative lawmakers, therapy influencers and healthcare decision-makers.

The AAMFT Foundation is shifting the paradigm to become pro-active in funding research based on the priorities of the field. The Foundation seeks to fund initiatives such as:

- 👑 Guidelines, Standards and Best Practices
- 👑 Epidemiology
- 👑 Industry Trending
- 👑 Workforce Development
- 👑 Professional Diversity
- 👑 Client Outcomes
- 👑 Therapist Needs Assessments
- 👑 Practice and Patient Management

### Education

The Foundation's diverse research outcomes spawn education offerings that benefit the therapist, client and community. By targeting initiatives that strengthen the practice of Marriage and Family Therapy, the Foundation elevates therapeutic client services. The Foundation funds educational offerings such as:

- 👑 Seminars
- 👑 Webinars
- 👑 Education Symposia
- 👑 Leadership Forums
- 👑 White/Position Papers
- 👑 Workshops

### Outreach

A message without a voice has no impact. The Foundation funds innovative programs that stimulate growth of the industry, foster collaboration and amplify the understanding and value of Marriage and Family Therapy. Initiatives include the support of:

- 👑 Scholarships
- 👑 Grants and Awards
- 👑 Awareness and Alliance Opportunities
  - Public
  - Profession
  - Aligned Industry
  - Government

The AAMFT Foundation is moving methodically forward to rigorously build capacity and strategically pursue research and education funding opportunities that provide MFT stakeholders with knowledge, tools and guidance to improve client outcomes. In order for the Foundation to fulfill its vision, a comprehensive and complementary plan for the procurement of funds is vital.

## *Pathway to Progress*

**B**uilding upon a recently conducted study, the Foundation is poised to embrace the voracious demand for education and evidence-based research by advancing a funding strategy that offers individuals, companies, friends and all stakeholders an opportunity to invest in the future of innovative healthcare solutions and the efficacy of client care. To succeed in achieving this goal and maximize the fundraising potential, stakeholders must see their financial commitment to the foundation as an investment in their future. Through the support of the Foundation:

- 👑 Therapists receive the finest research and benchmarking on best practices to guide their practices and tailor client therapy plans.
- 👑 Industry will gain access to evidence-based research and studies on industry trends, therapists' needs, and therapeutic standards.
- 👑 Other altruistic stakeholders such as foundations and charitable individuals outside of the profession can support therapeutic solutions for helping those impacted by mental illness.

Due to the diversity of its potential partners, the Foundation is implementing a comprehensive development approach to build financial capacity. The cornerstones of the fundraising program are:

- 👑 An annual appeal to all AAMFT members and industry partners that encourages broad participation at modest, renewable levels
- 👑 A multi-year partnership program to facilitate significant commitments and offer flexible terms for pledge fulfillment
- 👑 A planned giving program, which allows individuals to defer support through mechanisms such as wills, bequests and trusts

Foundation leadership understands the financial demands brought on by economic uncertainty and maintains an appropriate plan for recognizing each benefactor's commitment. To acknowledge the generosity and commitment of these visionaries, the Foundation has a tailored recognition program for annual supporters, multi-year partnerships and deferred gifts.

### ***Together, we can Succeed***

The AAMFT and its Foundation are steadfast in their commitment to improving the health of families suffering from disorders each and every day. Armed with evidence-based data funded by its Foundation, AAMFT can amplify its global voice and confirm its position as the leading advocate for Marriage and Family Therapy worldwide. The AAMFT Foundation presents an extraordinary opportunity for visionary individuals, companies and foundations to support critical initiatives that produce better outcomes and build stronger families. We ask for your support in advancing the practice and profession of marriage and family therapy.



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**American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
Research & Education Foundation**