Victory Report: Jacksonville Divorce Rate Decline

How Religious Organizations Drove the Local Divorce Rate Down 25% in Three Years

Executive Summary

For decades, Jacksonville, Florida, consistently had the highest divorce rate among all large Florida counties and one of the highest divorce rates in the United States. But over a three-year period, the divorce rate dropped to 20% below the state average to the lowest divorce rate of any large county in the state, seeing a decline in divorce that was 21% higher than that of comparable counties across the United States over the same time period.

> ***Churches offer a vision for marriage (through formal teachings), support for marriage (through classes, social events, and group ministries), and marital skills (which are taught in both formal and informal settings).***

Beginning in 2016, Communio, a nonprofit Christian organization that helps churches strengthen marriages, used predictive modelling to target couples at risk for divorce with ads directing them to www.JAXMarriage.org (no longer active). Communio and Live the Life Ministries (LTL) flooded the market with marriage education programs through its partnerships with local churches.

- The website (www.JAXMarriage.org) offered users a large collection of zip-code navigable local marriage resources run by the 93 churches that had partnered with Communio and the local organization, LTL.
- The ads framed marriage counseling as “investing” in one's marriage and aimed to normalize rather than stigmatize seeking out help.
- At-risk individuals were targeted with 12 ads per month through radio, digital, and billboards, resulting in an estimated 20 million impressions over two and a half years.
- The number of individuals engaging with church marital resources throughout the county rose from 300 in 2015 to about 60,000 over three years.

Because the most common denominations in Jacksonville are Baptist and Catholic, these are the churches Communio partnered with, first with a marriage event co-sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention and the local Catholic diocese. Communio credits the faith-based and church-based nature of the project with its success, arguing that federally funded programs fail because of their inability to operate within a religious environment.

THE FULL REPORT IS AVAILABLE TO OUR NETWORK OF PARTNERS
Contact Austin Mock to learn more: **austin@theamericafund.org**