Beyond philosophically grounding our work as family life educators, it is important that family life educators place their programmatic efforts in a scientifically supported, organizing framework. This chapter presents a prevention perspective and an integrative step-by-step framework for designing, creating, and implementing family life education (FLE) programs, which includes the following broad stages: problem analysis, program design, pilot testing, advance testing, and dissemination. Found within each stage are many subprocesses. For example, during the problem analysis stage, FLE professionals would be engaged in defining the problem or goal, identifying risk and protective factors, assessing accessibility of the target group, and forming a coalition of stakeholders who work together to address the problem.
As a guiding principle, family life educators focus on preventive education rather than therapeutic remediation (Arcus & Thomas, 1993). The modern prevention movement as related to family strengthening is about 25 to 30 years old (Small & Memmo, 2004). L’Abate (1983) was among the first to articulate the concept of prevention in the family field. L’Abate describes three levels of prevention: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary prevention-oriented family life educators help families develop the knowledge and skills they need to build strong relationships before any problems or issues present themselves, preventing problems before they occur. For example, most FLE websites are primary preventive in focus, as they are geared to transmit information and skills to the audience. Secondary prevention involves working with audiences who have some signs of risk, where intervention would prevent more serious problems from occurring (Small & Memmo, 2004). For example, a program developed to help parents overcome unbridled anger tendencies learned in their families of origin would be operating at this level. Tertiary prevention programs are designed for FLE audiences already experiencing a good deal of distress and for whom educational programs alone would not be adequate. Participants at this level require therapy, and such interventions normally are carried out by clinical professionals or family life educators who also have such training. FLE professionals typically operate at the primary and secondary prevention levels and leave tertiary prevention to family therapy (Doherty, 1995).

The concept of prevention has likewise been found in the fields of public health and the psychological and social sciences. In fact, a new discipline has emerged, termed prevention science, whose goal is “to prevent or moderate major human dysfunctions,” including those associated with marriage, family, and individual development (Coie et al., 1993, p. 1013).

Prevention science integrates the independent risk-focused paradigm (J. D. Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992) and protective or resiliency factors paradigm (e.g., Werner, 1990). Prevention science when applied to FLE focuses on the understanding of both risk factors and protective factors as a precursor to the development and implementation of FLE programs. Risk factors are variables that increase the vulnerability of individuals, couples, and families to a variety of negative outcomes; protective factors are safeguarding variables that increase an individual’s, couple’s, or family’s resistance to normative, developmental, or unplanned stressors (Bogenschneider, 1996; Rutter, 1987). The presence of risk factors or protective factors is not enough to ensure that a negative or positive outcome will occur but simply makes such outcomes more likely when present. Risk factors increase the
odds that negative outcomes will occur; protective factors increase the likelihood that negative states will be thwarted. Protective factors are activated only in the presence of risk factors (Small & Memmo, 2004).

Family science has progressed far enough in its knowledge about marriage and family relationships to be able to detail risk factors and protective factors for the prevention of marital distress, poor child development outcomes, and various psychological disorders. A science of prevention today pertains to marriage and familial disorders as much as it does to the prevention of heart disease and cancer. The most effective FLE programs are those that simultaneously and proactively work to reduce risks while increasing protection.

PREVENTION EDUCATION MODELS IN FLE

Since the emergence of prevention science, several models for developing prevention programs have appeared in the FLE scholarly literature. Each model helps us take family life educational program design beyond a “service mission” to a “scientific enterprise” (Dumka, Roosa, Michaels, & Suh, 1995, p. 78). Among the earliest developed was by Hughes (1994). He noted that FLE materials are of varying quality, not always following high development standards. He set about to articulate a straightforward four-step framework for the development of family life education programs that quality programs will incorporate. While some of the elements have a more direct application to program curricula, we agree with Hughes (1994) that most of the items can be applied to any FLE resource. These elements include content, instructional process, implementation process, and evaluation. In the content step, program developers consult appropriate theory and research and make sure that the research fits the audience (context sensitive) and that the ideas reflect best practices. The instructional process focuses on creation of sound teaching plans and presentation of materials in such a way that it is accessible to the audience. The implementation process includes meeting the needs of the target audience and having a marketing plan to reach participants. The evaluation process includes some provision for determining whether an FLE program benefits others, and program materials include evaluation tools that are closely tied to program goals and objectives.

Dumka et al. (1995) constructed a five-stage process for developing prevention programs, consisting of problem analysis, program design, pilot
testing, advance testing, and dissemination. Found within each stage are many other subprocesses. For example, during the problem analysis stage (Stage 1), FLE professionals would be engaged in defining the problem or goal, identifying risk and protective factors, and assessing accessibility of the target group. The first two stages address the formulation of an intervention theory, Stages 3 and 4 (implementation) become a test of the theory, and the final stages assess whether the program works and should be widely disseminated (Dumka et al., 1995).

Bogenschneider (1996) began with the epidemiological models of risk and protection from prevention science and placed them within the context of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) and developmental contextualism (Lerner, 1991, 1995). The result was an Ecological Risk/Protective Theoretical Model for the design and implementation of youth development programs. At least four premises derive from this perspective: (1) Outcomes are multiply determined, (2) proximal environments have the strongest and most direct influence on outcomes, (3) risk and protective factors occur at different levels of the human ecology (e.g., individual-family-community), and (4) these factors move and change through developmental time. From this basis, Bogenschneider proposes 12 principles for building prevention programs: (1) identify the real issues or problems facing youth; (2) establish well-defined goals that target the risk and protective processes associated with the identified youth issue or problem; (3) be comprehensive in addressing both risk and protective processes in several levels of the human ecology; (4) collaborate with stakeholders in the community or neighborhood; (5) educate coalition members on current theory and research on adolescent development, prevention programming, and community process; (6) tailor the plan to the community, reducing risks that exist locally and building protective processes that do not exist; (7) involve the target audience in program design, planning, and implementation; (8) be sensitive to cultural, ethnic, and other forms of diversity in the neighborhood or community; (9) intervene early and continuously; (10) select developmentally appropriate intervention strategies; (11) anticipate how changes in one part of the system may affect changes in the system or other settings; and (12) evaluate effectiveness by monitoring changes in risk and protective processes.

Small, Cooney, and O’Connor (2009), in their examination of evidence-based programs (EBP), particularly those designed especially for children, youth, and their parents, identified 11 principles of effective prevention programs. They organized these principles into four categories: program design and content, program relevance, program implementation, and program assessment and quality assurance. The program design and content
category comprises four principles: Effective programs are (1) theory driven, (2) of sufficient dosage and intensity, (3) comprehensive, and (4) actively engaging. The program relevance category features the next three principles: Effective programs are (5) developmentally appropriate, (6) appropriately timed, and (7) socioculturally relevant. The program implementation stage emphasizes the next two principles: Effective programs are (8) delivered by well-qualified, trained, and supportive staff and (9) focused on fostering good relationships. The program assessment and quality assurance category emphasizes the final two principles: Effective programs (10) are well documented and (11) are committed to evaluation and refinement.

These models have several similarities but also bring some unique perspectives and emphases important in the development of effective prevention programs. All can be used as guiding principles for developing programs but also for assessing the quality of current programs and improving existing programs. Below we integrate these models to form a how-to framework for the design of comprehensive, high-quality FLE programs. Many of these key elements are discussed in greater detail in chapters that follow. This framework has application to a wide variety of FLE resources: workshop series, websites, DVDs, or other educational approaches. We introduce this framework and provide relevant examples of its use.

A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL FOR THE DESIGN OF FAMILY LIFE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Stage 1: Problem Analysis

Identify Problem and Establish Overall Program Goal(s)

It is important to clearly articulate the problem or need one seeks to address through an FLE program. One way to do this is to formulate a brief research-informed problem statement. The statement also provides a built-in rationale for doing the program in the first place. Students in an undergraduate FLE class crafted the following problem statement for their transition to parenthood program. It is titled Making Room for Two When Baby Makes Three:

Current research shows that nearly half of all divorces occur within the first seven years of marriage. It has also been shown that the arrival of the first baby to a couple tends to increase the likelihood that either
the husband, wife, or both partners will experience a decline in marital satisfaction. Therefore, it is essential that couples become aware of this problem and make their marriage a priority during the transition to parenthood.

Identification of problems certainly comes from investigating extant scholarship. But as both Bogenschneider (1996) and Small et al. (2009) point out, such problems must be relevant and tied to real issues facing a community. Therefore, concomitant with problem analysis from a research and theory perspective is an analysis of the problem within the specific population we seek to serve, thereby avoiding the potential disconnect noted in Chapter 1. From a human ecological perspective, it is possible that problems identified more broadly may be unique to local community cultures; thus, family life educators will wisely survey individual targeted communities to learn of their specific problems and needs to ensure the sociocultural relevance of their program. Findings from local populations that demonstrate a problem or need may be more likely to motivate community buy-in than more remote research conducted in distant places. Local data collection also is often a more reliable way to determine needs and forestall wasteful spending of prevention dollars. For example, while serving as extension specialists in Alabama, we had the opportunity of conducting a Teen Assessment Project (TAP) survey, modeled after the Wisconsin Teen Assessment Project (Small & Hug, 1991), in various middle and high school locations throughout the state. In one location, school administrators were convinced that they faced a serious drug problem and were preparing to spend lots of district dollars on prevention programs. They invited us to administer the survey. Surprisingly to them, the survey data suggested that there were other risk behaviors going on that were far more serious, even deadly, leading the district to spend dollars on programs to address this higher priority concern.

With a problem defined, an overall program goal statement can be developed that points to the general direction a program will take to address the problem. This statement should also make reference to the target audience. For example, the goal of the aforementioned program was stated as follows: “The goal of Making Room for Two When Baby Makes Three is to enhance marital satisfaction among expectant and new parents as they face the birth of their first child.” Another example: “The ABC program is designed to help single parents identify and build upon their parenting strengths, enhancing their sense of competence as a parent.”
Identify Theories, Risk, and Protective Factors and Extract “Teachable” Ideas

The next step is to mine the current scholarly literature for the relevant research and theory addressing the problem and goal. In any outreach setting, from traditional workshops to websites, family life educators must address the following question: What scientific information do people need to know about this topic? In the area of family life, there is an explosion of information, some credible and some incredible, even implausible. Many persons are willing to be called a family “expert” through bringing forth armchair theories and ideas of their own design. In contrast, FLE programs must be grounded in the best current scholarship if they are to enjoy credibility. A strong scholarly base forms the foundation of the content, goals, objectives, and learning activities of FLE materials.

Knowing risk and protective factors associated with the identified problem enables family life educators to target and limit specific processes that lead to negative outcomes and target and increase specific processes leading to positive outcomes. For example, risk and prediction research has identified various negative interaction patterns that place couples at heightened risk for marital disruption, such as criticism, contempt, defensiveness, escalation, stonewalling, and negative interpretations (Gottman, 1994; H. J. Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2001). Research has also identified processes that enhance the well-being of marriage, such as nurturing friendship and commitment. Both risk and protective factors will range from those more or less modifiable within the context of an FLE program. For instance, parental divorce is a risk factor in marriage that is not modifiable. However, how a parental divorce plays out in a current marriage is possible to change. To be effective, FLE programs will need to focus on modifiable factors and increasing protection from the influence of negative processes that may have been produced by the factors.

Extract the “teachable” ideas and principles from theories and research, those ideas that can be summarized from a wide array of well-conducted studies that are practical, useful, and theoretically and empirically sound. Some examples include the following: “The more authoritative a parent is, the better off their children will be as they grow.” “The more married couples accurately read one another’s love language, the better the marriage.” “Risks for divorce are reduced when couples learn to handle conflict and disagreements effectively.”

Teachable ideas such as these are usually embedded within or supportive of broader ideas deduced from theories related to or applied to the family,
such as family systems theory, family stress theory, communications theory, exchange theory, family development theory, human ecology theory, or social learning theory. For example, in consulting the scholarly literature for a basis for the transition to parenthood program Making Room for Two When Baby Makes Three, program creators discovered that much of the research was informed by family development theory (e.g., developmental transitions) and family stress theory (e.g., transitions, even pleasant ones, can be experienced as stressful).

Some theoretical perspectives naturally lend themselves characteristics of effective FLE, as noted by Small et al. (2009). For example, a program developed with a human ecology lens is likely to be more comprehensive and socioculturally relevant. A family development theory perspective will naturally attune a family life educator to create programs that are developmentally appropriate and appropriately timed. A program for strengthening single parents might in part be based on targeted ecologically sensitive research that identifies the characteristics of effective single parents.

As an example of using theory and research to build an FLE program, some years ago I (Duncan) developed a Making Families Stronger program. It was based on ecological systems theory, which asserts that families have the first and foremost influence on human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). Therefore, of all the human systems deserving attention, the family microsystem deserves prime time. The program also drew on family empowerment theory (Cochran & Woolever, 1983), which holds that families have inherent strengths that can be mobilized to help them have the kind of family they want. These ideas provided a theoretical justification for teaching families about how to be stronger. Finally, the program was based on 30 years of family research conducted all over the world concerning what characteristics make families strong and healthy, or protective factors known as family strengths (Krysan, Moore, & Zill, 1990). Some families focus only on problems (their risk factors). Instead, this literature helps families identify strengths and how families could identify and build them.

Family life educators are wise to have a working knowledge of several major theoretical frameworks and how to use them to build their programs. While we won't attempt to provide a theories course in this text, we do think it is important to show several of the theories, key principles behind the theories, and their application in family life education. See Table 2.1 for a listing of common family theories, general principles of the theories, and their application to family life education. We encourage family life educators to consult good family theory books for more in-depth background on theoretical perspectives (for example, see Chibucos & Leite, 2005, for an excellent orientation to key concepts and research examples that show the features of the theory).
## Table 2.1: Using Family Theories for the Design of Family Life Education Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Key Principles</th>
<th>Application to FLE</th>
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| Family systems theory   | Family members interact with one another in an interdependent, coherently characteristic way.  
                           | Family systems have a powerful effect on individual family member behavior.  
                           | Family systems reflect input received by family members synergistically interacting together.  
                           | Inputs (such as educational information) have predictable outputs (such as relationship outcomes). A system may embrace change (morphogenesis) or resist it (morphostasis).  
                           | Family systems are nested within and are influenced by larger social systems (community, culture).  
                           | Try to teach all members of a target audience system (couples rather than one partner, both parents rather than one parent, parents and children rather than just parents, and children and parents rather than parents alone) because a change in one member may be sabotaged by other family members.  
                           | One family member can trigger change in a relationship system.  
                           | Positive change potential is enhanced at timely transitions (during developmental change).  |
| Social exchange theory  | Relationship stability and quality predicted by rewards minus costs in interaction.  
                           | Programs attempt to build relationship assets (e.g., enhance positivity in marriage) and reduce relationship liabilities (e.g., reduce negativity in marriage).  |
| Family development theory | Families grow and change over developmental time.  
                           | Programs targeted in different ways to persons dependent on their family developmental course (Becoming a Couple; Parenting Teens and Handling Your Midlife Challenges; Getting Ready for Retirement).  |
| Human ecology theory    | Development occurs through the interaction of a mosaic of factors; family microsystems influence and are influenced by transactions with other systems (e.g., neighborhood, peer group, school, workplace).  
                           | “Silver bullet” programs addressing only one aspect of the ecological system typically are insufficient; must address several areas of the social ecology simultaneously. A balancing work and family program teaching parents balance skills should also teach businesses how to establish family-friendly policies.  |
| Symbolic interaction    | Families make meaning and interpret events based on norms, values, expectations, patterns of behavior, and interaction.  
                           | Allow opportunities for families to construct their own meanings of events and ideas. Ask questions such as, “What meaning does this have for you?” |
In all of this process, it is important to remember that adult audiences usually have already formed their opinions about many topics we address and in many cases have real-life experiences to support them. For instance, parents have experiences being parents, and family life educators who do not take that into account, regardless of how powerful their science-based ideas are, will risk alienating their audiences. We believe family life educators should seek out and find the principles that their clientele need to know the most. While many factors influence our content selection decisions, we believe that the most useful and valid FLE information is found at the intersection of the following four elements: (1) ideas are grounded in sound scholarship; (2) ideas ring true or fit with our values and instincts; (3) ideas fit with and incorporate the knowledge, culture, expertise, and lived experience of the learners; and (4) ideas work in practice (see Figure 2.1).

*Do the ideas ring true?* As family life educators, we often strive to empower parents to trust their own values and instincts as they parent their children and are challenged to design learning experiences where they can find parenting solutions within the context of their values (DeBord et al., 2002). The same recommendation seems to apply to us as we endeavor to select the best and most useful information to share with our outreach audiences. Family life educators can critically inquire, “Does the information or research recommendation fit with my own values and instincts? Do the ideas ring true?”

*Do the ideas fit with and incorporate the knowledge, culture, expertise, and lived experience of the learners?* In Chapter 1, we emphasized that most effective family life educators incorporate the best scientific information with the knowledge, lived experience, culture, and expertise of families in
Designing Comprehensive Family Life Education Prevention Programs • 37

In selecting from scholarly materials, family life educators will seek to choose materials as free from bias as possible and general enough in principle that they can be applied in a variety of settings and cultures. Part of this involves care in reviews of literature to ensure that the basis of our material is as representative as possible of the audiences we seek to serve, realizing that all scholarship will have its limitations. However, beyond this, when family life educators are in teaching settings, they will need to find ways to incorporate what participants bring with them into the educational setting.

*Do the ideas work in practice?* Experiences with principles may have taken us only so far, and there are ideas our FLE audiences may hear from us or from one another that they haven’t tried out. We can encourage them to experiment with the ideas they hear. Part of assessing the validity of an idea is to test it out in our own lives. It may be based on many studies, it may ring true, and it may be reinforced by the experiences of many, but will it work for me? Of course, no one strategy works for everyone under all circumstances. But if a tool proves useful in some instances, it can be kept handy to use when needed. We test the idea out in the laboratory of our own experience so we know whether or not it works for us.

*Form a Coalition of Stakeholders Who Work Together to Address the Problem*

As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 16, most family concerns are too complex and need solutions too comprehensive for any single entity to address alone. Wise family life educators will seek to join forces with other like-minded persons in addressing family concerns. As was discussed in the previous chapter, communities bring with them their own special expertise, with family life educators comprising one player at the collaborative table. “Involving local citizens in planning helps ensure that prevention programs fit the community, promotes local ownership, and engenders commitment to seeing that the program is implemented and maintained” (Bogenschneider, 1996, p. 132). Once a coalition is formed, family life educators can use their expertise to educate coalition members on current theory and research addressing the problem. After a coalition to address youth concerns was formed in a small Montana town, an FLE professional shared with them the risk factors and protective factors associated with youth development and worked with them to design and implement a survey that assessed these factors in several high schools in the area. Findings from the survey provided an empirical basis for targeted youth development programs within the participating schools.
Stage 2: Program Design

Consult the Target Group

As a prelude to or concomitant with other aspects of program design is the task of assessing target audience needs. Many FLE programs fail because they do not spend time thoroughly investigating the needs of target audiences (more about this will be discussed in Chapter 17 in the context of marketing FLE programs). Consulting the target audience is a way of checking out the fit of the research literature with the actual audience for whom an educational product is intended. There are at least three kinds of needs to assess (Arcus et al., 1993b).

Felt needs are those sought from audiences in response to direct questioning through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. It is what they say they need. For example, the question, “What concerns do you have about parenting teenagers nowadays?” asked of parents of teens would be a question designed to elicit felt need responses, as well as, “If a program were designed to help you be a better parent for your teenagers, what would it contain?”

Ascribed needs are those family life educators may observe because of their specialized knowledge. These are the needs family life educators may attribute to the group as a result of a review of the literature. To continue with the example of parents of teens, a large representative study of teens may reveal that they are much less likely to participate in risky sexual behavior when their parents appropriately monitor their activities. From these data, family life educators might decide that parents of teens need to learn how to monitor their teens, such as using the who-what-where-when approach (who are you going to be with, what will you be doing, where will you be going, and when will you be home?).

Future needs involve the skills and abilities required to accomplish future tasks and perform future roles. The idea of anticipatory socialization suggests that transitions to new roles are easier when we learn as much as we can about a role before we perform that role. Future needs can be tapped by asking such questions as, “What do couples preparing for marriage need to know prior to marriage?”

There are numerous ways to consult the target audience, from conducting interviews, sending mail questionnaires, and using existing data about the audience. To aid in the design of their parenting program for high-risk families, after reviewing the literature, Dumka et al. (1995) conducted focus group interviews with various subgroups of their targeted population. A total of 53 parents divided into six groups participated and were asked open-ended questions that probed their needs as parents, their children’s needs, and the resources in the community currently available to meet
those needs. Parents requested a program that would provide information regarding drug and alcohol abuse to parents and children and teach parenting skills such as improved communication and disciplining children. There was some variation in reported felt needs among the groups, and these variations were considered accordingly in program design.

The involvement of the target audience is critical not only in program design but also in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the program. Wise family life educators will include members of the target audience on their coalition and will seek their input at every stage of the program. When deciding on how best to evaluate the effectiveness of our program to help families on public assistance gain self-sufficiency, a group of family life educators (Duncan, Dunnagan, Christopher, & Paul, 2003) first field tested their evaluation protocol with several low-income, limited-literacy participants and made some adjustments based on their feedback.

Select Change Objectives

Change objectives, also called learning objectives, refer to the knowledge level, attitudes, values, behaviors, skills, and aspirations targeted for change by the program. Fulfillment of these objectives lead to the positive outcomes predicted by the theories and research and desired by the target audience.

Family life educators may be tempted to make a simple list of topics from their literature review of teachable ideas as a means of guiding their instruction. A learner-centered approach changes this focus and invites the educator to specifically identify what learners should get out of the learning experience (Fink, 2003). Thus, change objectives (also called learning objectives) are stated in specific, measurable, learner-centered (e.g., what participants will learn, do, feel, not the instructor), action-oriented terms (e.g., what will occur as a result of the program) that include active verbs (e.g., learn, understand, apply, practice, identify, compare and contrast, critique, do).

Thus, as you formulate learning objectives, there are certain questions that are important to ask (adapted from Fink, 2003):

Knowledge. What do you want your learning audience to know (or think about, reflect upon)? For example, what key information (facts, terms, concepts) is important for the learners to understand and remember? What key ideas or perspectives are important for learners to comprehend? One educator wanted his workshop audience to understand the difference between a problem-focused perspective and a family strengths perspective to building
DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

a strong family, and he formulated the following specific learning objective: Participants will be able to distinguish between a problem-focused approach and a family strengths perspective to strengthening their family.

Caring. What changes would you like to see in what your learners care about, as expressed in their attitudes, values, and feelings? What attitudes and values do you want them to develop or reconsider? What affective experiences do you want them to have with the material?

One educator wanted to change her audience’s attitudes toward housework from one of “mere drudgery” to “an opportunity for family connection.” Thus, a primary learning objective became “Participants will view housework as a potential setting for family members to strengthen their relationships with each other.”

Application. What behaviors would you like them to change? What important skills do you want them to learn?

Interventionist-oriented family life educators often will be interested in structuring instruction in ways that evoke change in behaviors and development of skills. Family life educators leading parenting workshops may want their parents to learn authoritative approaches to parenting. A learning objective appropriate for this area might be the following: Participants will learn and practice three skills pertinent to authoritative parenting: establishing connection, regulating children’s behavior, and promoting autonomy. Perhaps in the same program, family life educators are interested in promoting the use of positive approaches to discipline, including reducing the use of corporal punishment as a strategy. A possible learning objective would be the following: Parents will learn and practice numerous options for dealing with a difficult child behavior that they have faced at home.

Select Outcome Evaluation Instruments

The purpose of evaluation is to assess whether a program is showing progress in meeting change objectives. The instruments selected must allow us to evaluate changes in the risk and protective factors that can be attributed to the program and must be directly tied to program objectives. Some tools that have demonstrated reliability and validity can be selected, provided they fit change objectives. Otherwise, they must be created and pilot tested to ensure their usefulness.

In the Making Families Stronger program, I (Duncan) had the goal of increasing the levels of self-reported family life satisfaction through the processes of identifying and building one’s family strengths. The change objective was to “increase family life satisfaction levels among participating
families.” I selected David Olson’s Family Life Satisfaction scale (Olson, Stewart, & Wilson, 1990) as my outcome evaluation tool, which is a reliable and valid measure of family life satisfaction directly tied to the change objective that also incorporated a family strengths approach in the development of the items. Thus, it was the “perfect” tool for my purposes.

Quality FLE programs will include provisions for conducting evaluations, including evaluation instruments tied to program goals and objectives. See Chapter 3 for a full discussion of evaluation.

**Select Change Methods and Learning Activities**

Change methods will be wisely tied to change objectives. An important question to ask is, “What method would be most effective to accomplish this objective?” For example, a skills-related objective calls for a skill-teaching methodology. Steps include the following: (a) describe the skill, (b) model the skill, (c) practice the skill in a nonstressful setting and situation, (d) receive reinforcement and corrective feedback, and (e) use the skill in a real-life setting, that is, at home (also see Chapter 6). Other types of objectives would draw from other methods. In quality FLE programs, a variety of teaching methods effective with adult learners are used, including buzz groups, role-playing, visuals, video clips, and various forms of discussion (see Chapter 6). These methods would be sensitive to a diversity of learning styles, sensory modalities, developmental needs, and abilities (see Chapter 8). Quality FLE programs are actively engaging, using active learning strategies (Small et al., 2009) that incorporate the knowledge, culture, expertise, and lived experience of the learners (Doherty, 2001). Directions on how to facilitate the learning process would be included, including the amount of time to be spent on each teaching activity. Chapters 4 to 6 provide detailed information on how to design effective instruction leading to meaningful learning experiences for our audiences.

In deciding on the best methods, wise family life educators will also examine existing programs for methods that work with their population, often called “best practices.” The process of learning about other programs, methods used, and their effectiveness is critical to identifying these practices. It can also save program development time and energy. Ask yourself, “What can I learn from these programs without having to reinvent the wheel, at the same time incorporating my own imagination/creative energy?”

**Decide Program Extensiveness**

Dumka et al. (1995) identify three dimensions of program extensiveness. The first of these is the selectiveness of the program. A *universal*
program is designed for everyone. A parenting program following a ParentTeacher Association (PTA) meeting billed “for all parents” would be such a program. Such a program avoids the risk of inviting only certain parents, and thus parents avoid a labeling stigma. However, it may be too general to make a significant difference among persons needing a targeted program. A selective program would be targeted to particular subgroups of participants (e.g., single parents, seniors) or subgroups exhibiting risk factors a program seeks to address (e.g., families receiving public assistance). An indicated program would be developed for an audience exhibiting negative outcomes, such as parents court-ordered to participate in parenting programs as an adjunct to counseling. Such audiences may include participants whose needs cannot be effectively met with preventative FLE alone (Dumka et al., 1995). A second aspect of program extensiveness is breadth, or the number and range of change objectives. Following an ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) orientation in relation to prevention programs, Bogenschneider (1996) recommends that change objectives range across several levels of the human ecology. For example, a program designed to help employed parents harmonize work and family would also help employers craft family-friendly workplace policies and promote workfamily harmony through media channels. A program focused on only one level will likely be limited in impact, as other systems in the social ecology may act to sabotage newfound insights and strategies. For example, the excitement of learning to harmonize family and work in a community workshop may be drained when the workplace refuses to grant flextime.

A third dimension of program extensiveness is length, what Small et al. (2009) refer to as intensity or dosage. While shorter programs may be the desire of a target audience and more appealing from a marketing perspective, longer programs are more effective in producing reliable, longer lasting changes. For example, in marriage education, where the audiences tend to be of lower risk for marital disruption (Carroll & Doherty, 2003), longer programs involving more than 12 contact hours produce somewhat better outcomes than shorter programs (Guerney & Maxson, 1990). Where audiences are of greater risk, the ideal length of contact may be much longer. For programs to have a significant impact on families at risk of child abuse, some argue that programs should be at least 6 to 18 months in length. It has been found that parents who participate for a longer duration (~ 2 years) and who used all services offered (at least 3–5 programs) had better outcomes than those receiving less intense and shorter-term services (Whipple & Wilson, 1996). The National Research Council (1993) reviewed several child abuse prevention programs and found that programs that were short term and low in
intensity did not change long-term relationships between parents and children. In an era of social media, dosage and intensity will likely take on different forms than it has in the past (see more discussion on the role of social media in Chapter 12).

**Design Recruitment/Retention Strategy**

One of the greatest challenges family life educators face is recruitment and retention of audiences. As part of needs assessments surveys, wise family life educators will consult the target audience about the best ways to recruit and retain an audience. Recruitment and marketing, including the creation of a marketing plan, is a focus of Chapter 17. Dumka et al. (1995) followed this strategy during their focus groups and were given several suggestions: (a) include both parents and children in the program so they could talk about what they were learning, (b) help parents develop a support group so they could help each other during and after the program, (c) provide child care and refreshments, and (d) offer the program close to home with no more than one meeting a week.

**Tailor Program Content and Delivery**

Programs designed after a “one-size-fits-all” model are doomed to failure. Program content and delivery must be tailored to the needs of the audience and the community or made socioculturally relevant (Small et al., 2009). For example, the content and approach should be sensitive to cultural, ethnic, and other forms of diversity (see Chapter 8). This effort is especially critical since much of social science research that undergirds FLE materials is biased toward White, middle-class families. To maximize participation, implementation strategies should be based on target audience felt needs and preferences. For example, a standard curriculum was not acceptable in one community until after the inclusion of recruitment meetings (drummed up by current participants where recruits were invited by current participants), teachers from the same culture, and home visits for those participants facing transportation barriers. In one program for limited-resource families (Duncan et al., 2003), educators kept the material simple and to the point because of the vast differences in participant educational levels. Materials were adjusted to relate to very basic levels of life skills. Written materials were written at a low reading level or were simple enough that they could be easily adapted or interpreted. Family life educators developing curricula to help lower-income families make transitions from welfare dependency to self-support would make sure that
the theory, research, and interventions are based on an understanding of the complex needs of limited resource (limited in terms of education and perception of personal resources as well as income) at different levels of their social ecology (at the individual, family, and community levels) (Christopher et al., 2001).

Stage 3: Pilot Testing

Once programs have been developed, they are ready for testing in the field. The goal of pilot testing is to “implement the prototype program with participants and in contexts as similar to the targeted participants and contexts as possible” (Dumka et al., 1995, p. 84). Dumka et al. (1995) recommend doing three kinds of evaluation at this stage: recruitment and retention, process, and formative evaluation.

Recruitment and Retention Evaluation

This is the process of assessing whether your recruitment strategy designed during Stage 2 is working. Since FLE in community settings often suffers from underwhelming participation, and participation is vital for the existence of the program, this piece of evaluation is vital. If the recruitment strategy you used for a parenting program included circulating a flyer to all parents of fourth graders and only 3 of an eligible 100 parents showed up for the program, it would be clear that recruitment strategies need changing. The Dumka et al. (1995) strategy noted above resulted in more than 53% of parents participating in five or more sessions—quite successful for a program such as this.

Process Evaluation

This kind of evaluation provides information about the overall management of the program to assess if the program is functioning as designed. It would include an adjudicated assessment of instruction (e.g., is quality information being taught?), logistics (evaluation of the meeting place, food, and transportation), how evaluation processes are perceived by participants (e.g., do participants find evaluation questions too personal or complex?), level of community support (e.g., media pieces supporting the program), support from stakeholders (e.g., county commissioners giving the program attention), and a host of other elements. Feedback on processes from both staff and clientele is important. We call this kind of evaluation “project quality control.”
Formative Evaluation

Quality FLE resources include some provision for determining if the materials benefit others. Formative evaluation assesses participants’ direct experience with program material and exposes what modifications may be necessary to improve their learning experience. At a pilot testing stage, it is appropriate for family life educators to administer a brief questionnaire at the end of each session and ask whether the participants learned something new, what were the strengths in the program, and how the program might be improved. Evaluation tools are clearly tied to program goals and objectives. Both process and formative evaluation are part of the “program clarification” tier of evaluation (Jacobs, 1988), which will be fully discussed in Chapter 3.

Program Revision

Process and formative evaluation will likely point to needed changes. Family life educators need to identify and decide what they are going to do differently based on the pilot feedback they receive. Data may suggest needed content, implementation, or evaluation changes. For example, formative evaluation of a website led to changes in the format of the articles and the adding of some user-friendly features (such as the ability to e-mail an article to a friend or family member). In another program, process evaluation revealed that many participants complained about being expected to complete pre- and posttests that were long and tedious. The evaluators decided to provide a nominal financial incentive of $10 per completed questionnaire.

Stage 4: Advanced Testing

Those whose focus is to develop and refine programs toward broad dissemination will want to take advanced steps to establish effectiveness. After integrating changes suggested during pilot testing, a program is ready for more advanced assessment. The goal of advanced testing is to evaluate the ability of a program to make significant changes in targeted risk factors and protective factors. In other words, it asks, “Does the program truly accomplish the stated change objectives?” This is often called summative or outcome evaluation. For a parenting program, this may mean the enhancement of not only reported parenting skills but also translation to better outcomes long term among participating parents’ children. To
answer these kinds of questions requires assessment sophistication greater than pilot testing.

Advance testing includes the processes of choosing an experimental design, implementing the revised program, analyzing the data, and continuing to refine the program. While some programs collect data that masquerade as impact data (Small, 1990), advance testing of program impact requires an experimental research design. This is because experimental designs most effectively control competing explanations for what may be positive outcomes. Perhaps the most common experimental research design is the pretest, posttest, control group design. If a program is important enough to collect experimental design data, the data deserve more sophisticated treatment as well, to help answer more definitively important questions. For instance, a common FLE question, beyond one of general program impact, is, “For whom is the program most effective?” Analyses such as multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) can help answer that question.

Stage 5: Dissemination

Imagine this: You have developed a program for families with widespread community support. You have field tested it with the families for whom it was intended and have made some adjustments in the program and how you carry it out, as a result of the candid input from program participants and staff. You have taken the revised program, continued to make refinements, and have subjected it to an ultimate test: an evaluation using an experimental design. Findings from your evaluation suggest that the program successfully meets change objectives and is significantly reducing some risk factors among parents (e.g., harsh discipline strategies, lack of social support) and significantly increasing protective factors (e.g., use of affirming, loving messages with youngsters, more shared parenting). Your program is a success, and you feel justifiably proud of the effort you and your coalition have made with families in your community. You are now ready to take your program forward to the masses, to export it and what you have learned to other communities, so that your efforts might strengthen families in those communities as well.

The goal of the dissemination stage is the widespread adoption of the program. Programs beginning in one area expand to other communities and often become institutionalized and part of community culture. Dissemination involves identifying potential users of the program, promoting the program (through publications and other targeted
venues; more about promotion and marketing will be discussed in Chapter 17), publishing results of evaluation studies in scholarly journals, and providing technical assistance to those interested in adopting the program.

Table 2.2 summarizes the steps we have discussed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2.2</th>
<th>A Comprehensive Framework for Designing Family Life Prevention Programs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 1: Problem Analysis</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify Problem/Establish Overall Program Goal</td>
<td>Program goal should clarify the audience (e.g., The ABC program is designed to help <em>single parents</em> identify and build upon their parenting strengths, enhancing their sense of competence as a parent.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consult the Scholarly Literature</td>
<td>Identify current theories/research addressing the problem/goal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Risk factors/protective factors, predictors of positive outcomes, etc.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Extract the “teachable” ideas/principles from theories/research, those that are practical/useful in addressing the problem. Examples:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The more authoritative a parent is, the better off their children will be as they grow.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The more married couples accurately read one another’s love language, the better the marriage.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Risks for divorce are reduced when couples learn to handle conflict and disagreements effectively.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Form a Coalition of Stakeholders Who Work Together to Address the Problem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educate coalition members on current theory and research addressing the problem</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 2: Program Design</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consult Target Group—Assess Their Needs</td>
<td>Assess needs using focus groups, interviews, questionnaires, existing data, etc.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Felt, ascribed (those you discern because of your specialized knowledge), and future needs (e.g., what do couples preparing for marriage need to know?)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Involve the target audience in program design, planning, and implementation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Seek their input at every stage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Select Change Objectives</td>
<td>Knowledge, attitudes, behaviors/skills, and aspirations targeted for change</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tied to promoting the positive outcomes predicted by the theories and research and desired by the target audience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Stated in specific, action-oriented terms (e.g., what will participants be able to do as a result of the program?)

Select Evaluation Tools
- Formative and summative
- Instruments directly tied to program objectives

Select Change Methods
- Tied to objectives—a skills objective needs a skill development method
- Review existing programs to find “best practices”
- Use adult learner methods focused on active learning—buzz groups, role-playing, discussion groups, skill practice, etc.
- Give attention to learning styles, sensory modalities, and developmental needs/abilities

Decide Program Extensiveness
- **Selectiveness:** Universal (y'all come), selective (audience exhibiting risk factors), or indicated (audience exhibiting negative outcomes)
- **Breadth:** Range of change objectives (e.g., comprehensive, in terms of level of human ecology, or more focused on one or two levels)
- **Length:** Shorter or longer? Dosage and intensity

Design Recruitment/Retention Strategy
- Ask the target audience what is best way to recruit and retain an audience
- Marketing plan

Tailor Program Content and Delivery
- Tailored to needs of audience/community; appropriately timed; developmentally appropriate
- Sensitive to cultural, ethnic, and other forms of diversity; sociocultural relevance
- Implementation strategies, based on target audience needs and focus group findings, to maximize participation
  - Recruitment meetings
  - Teachers of same culture
  - Home visits

*Stage 3: Pilot Testing*

Implement Program
- Recruitment and Retention Evaluation
  - Is it working? Are people coming and staying or returning?
- Process Evaluation
  - Project quality control
- Formative Evaluation
- Program Revision
ASSESSING ELEMENTS OF PROGRAM QUALITY
IN EXISTING PROGRAMS

The integrated framework shows us step by step how to develop a comprehensive FLE program. It also tells us what to look for in quality FLE programs and suggests a framework to assess ways an FLE resource could be improved. On the basis of his parsimonious four-step program development model, Hughes (1994) created an assessment tool to use as a means of evaluating the extent to which elements of effectiveness occur in existing programs. While not all of the elements above are evaluated by this tool, many are. You may want to use it to evaluate existing resources and identify areas needing improvement. See Appendix C for the Family Life Education Program Resource Review Form.

CHARACTERISTICS OF STRONG, SUSTAINABLE
FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

As important as it is to have strong program curricula consisting of a strong theory and research base, clear goals and objectives, methods consistent with objectives, attention to diverse audiences, a guide for implementation, and evaluation tools tied to the objectives, program curricula are only part of successful, sustainable FLE programs. Many elements of quality comprehensive programs transcend specific curricula. Drawing on the published literature and experiences of leading community-based programs, Lee, Mancini, Miles, and Marek (1996) identified eight characteristics of quality
These characteristics are important to keep in mind as you seek to build a comprehensive FLE program in a community that will stand the test of time. Some of these characteristics are also reiterations and extensions of important elements found in quality community-based FLE curricula.

1. Successful community programs are community based and carried out in collaboration with many community partners. Successful programs emerge from the needs of the community rather than from the desires of outsiders. Instead of “one size fits all,” these programs are flexibly implemented and adapt to community needs. They embed themselves in the local community, becoming part of a network of supportive services carried out by collaborative professionals and volunteers (Lee et al., 1996). This collaborative approach minimizes turf issues, brings more resources to bear on a community issue, maximizes effectiveness in program planning and implementation, and increases the likelihood a program will stand the test of time (Duncan et al., 2003).

2. Successful community programs are comprehensive in scope, based on an ecological or systems view of individuals, families, and communities. The best programs operate at many levels (e.g., individual, family, and community) and incorporate not only specific family-based programs but efforts to strengthen the community context as well (Lee et al., 1996). Clientele are viewed as individuals within families within communities, and programs are designed accordingly. Successful, long-lasting prevention results are most often the result of consistent, multilevel, multifaceted efforts. For instance, in addition to parenting skills, a comprehensive “Parenting Teens” program might also provide “peer mentoring” to encourage prosocial teen activity, newsletters for parents and other caring adults who work with teens, and media messages promoting positive parent-teen relationships. Successful efforts at adolescent drug abuse prevention would seek to minimize or eliminate risk factors occurring at the individual level (e.g., low self-efficacy), the family level (e.g., uninvolved parenting), and the peer group level (e.g., peers who use drugs) as well as enhance protective factors at the same levels (individual: religious commitment; family: involved parenting; peer: peers who are non-drug users). Likewise, during program design stages, program developers would include persons in their task forces representing different levels of
the social ecology, including parents, youth, school personnel, and other adults who have an interest in the development of youth. Many researchers report that such an approach is critical to the success of prevention programs (Lee et al., 1996).

3. Successful community programs are inclusive of program participants in program planning, delivery, and evaluation.

Successful programs involve participants at every level of program development, from predesign stages to implementation and evaluation. Even if programs are employed in different areas, clientele from those specific communities are involved so that the program is responsive to local needs. In addition, there is what Lee et al. (1996) refer to as an “integrative approach” to program planning. Local leaders are identified and trained, and local participants are fully involved in the planning and decision making regarding a program or its policies, philosophy, or procedures.

4. Successful community programs are preventive in nature through successfully interfacing service and education, as well as recognizing and building on participants’ strengths to enhance skills.

Successful programs designed to foster resiliency and limit risks among children, youth, and families accomplish their goals through preventive, empowering means rather than through remediation. Thus, these programs aim to stop problem behaviors before they get started, often as early intervention (Lee et al., 1996). In addition, some of these programs focus on helping clientele identify and build upon strengths they already have.

5. Successful community programs are developmentally appropriate and based on current research.

Successful programs are based on best practice models of effective programming noted in the scholarly literature and on the specific needs of their communities. The research comprises community needs assessments, the existing scholarly literature, and the best strategies for reaching a target audience. Needs assessments may include existing data already available (e.g., state child abuse data) as well as new data collected from the target audience to refine an understanding of the issue for a specific community population, as well as how to best reach them.

Such programs often follow a community-university partnership model, where the community presents the issue in a unified context and
university-based researchers provide the expertise of the scientific literature to address the community need.

6. Successful community programs are accessible to participants with a mix of program deliveries based on participant needs.

To be effective, FLE programs must be accessible to their intended audience (Lee et al., 1996). Clientele may face significant barriers that prevent them from attending programs located at community centers or other venues. Increasing accessibility may mean that the program is held in small groups or one-on-one in the homes of clientele. For many clientele, location may be a critical factor as well as its perceived safety, ease of access via public transportation, and free parking nearby.

Other aspects of accessibility are also important. Successful programs consider language needs, literacy rate, and educational level of the participants and then gear the material accordingly (Lee et al., 1996). For example, instructional classes might be offered in small groups or one-on-one, as needed, allowing for more individualized attention and for materials to be more effectively adapted to individual participant needs. Other strategies include keeping material simple and to the point, using a variety of hands-on activities, and conducting support groups in and out of a learning setting. Successful programs also use existing services as a means to achieve their ends, such as community forums, newsletters, conferences, and workshops.

7. Successful community programs are accountable to stakeholders and are able to demonstrate positive outcomes in participants and community environments.

To be sustained, comprehensive community-based programs need to demonstrate some defensible measure of effectiveness. They need to be able to show stakeholders that the results achieved have been worth the investment in time and money. Such programs incorporate an ongoing evaluation of what works, what does not work, and what changes need to be made to improve services to clientele and the community. These data are often both quantitative (e.g., statistics showing improvement in parenting competence attributed to a parenting course) and qualitative in nature (success stories of family budgeting principles in practice) and report data not only from program participants but also from staff, partners/collaborators, and stakeholders.
8. Successful community programs have leaders with vision.

This final characteristic of strong, sustainable programs has more to do with leadership than with program substance. Leaders of these programs are, according to Lee et al. (1996), able to think through an organization’s mission and establish it clearly and visibly. They serve as models, symbolizing a group’s unity and identity. They view themselves as ultimately responsible and therefore surround themselves with strong associates and subordinates who function ably and independently and whose development they encourage. They function in a team relationship. Importantly they demonstrate long range vision, showing an ability to think beyond the day’s crises, beyond the quarter. They are able to reach and influence constituents beyond their jurisdictions. They think in terms of renewal, seeking the revisions of process and structure by an ever-changing reality. (pp. 13–14)

These leaders offer strong and committed leadership, keeping the program’s vision in front of decision makers over years, being consistent with service at various sites, facilitating partnerships and ongoing community collaboration, bringing key partners together to renew and articulate program visions and strategies, and developing consensus. These eight principles are summarized in Table 2.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Elements of Strong, Sustainable, Comprehensive Programs</th>
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It is important for prevention-oriented family life educators to ground their work in a scientific framework of program design. This chapter has presented a practical how-to framework for the design of comprehensive FLE programs. Family life educators can use these guidelines to help them develop their own resources and assess or improve the quality of existing resources. FLE programs constructed with careful and appropriate attention to these elements of quality design, implementation, and evaluation are likely to serve FLE audiences better than those that do not and certainly improve FLE practice. In addition, when family life educators seek to establish comprehensive community-based programs that transcend curricula, they are wise to model programs that use the eight characteristics of sustainable programs discussed in this chapter.

The following activities can help you translate these ideas into your own program development efforts.

1. Identify a problem topic and create a rough outline of your program strategy in Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the framework. Try it out with topics of widespread importance in communities, such as strengthening single parents, preventing adolescent drug use, preparing for remarriage, and managing stress and crisis in families.

2. Do an inventory of existing family life programs. Identify the levels of prevention at which they operate (primary, secondary, and tertiary) and how extensive they are (universal, selective, or indicated).

3. The authors recommend analyzing the problem through exploring related research and theory prior to consulting the target group to assess their needs. What are some advantages and disadvantages of doing this? How can the disadvantages be addressed?

4. Identify an FLE resource (curricula, website, etc.) and, using the review form provided in Appendix C, do a “quality elements” assessment. On the basis of this evaluation, discuss whether you would use the resource and how you would improve it. Use the review form as a checklist for ensuring the quality of your own resources.

5. Locate and investigate comprehensive FLE programs in your community. Evaluate these programs against the eight characteristics of strong, sustainable programs discussed in this chapter. Find out how long the programs have existed. Do the longer lasting ones have more of the characteristics?