

# Alternatives to Marriage PROJECT

**Annual Report 2002**

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Our children know their parents adore each other, and that our partnership will last a lifetime. And they are being educated to be critical of the role that government plays in legitimizing and limiting people's personal relationships. A "marriage of the heart" carries more weight in our world than a "marriage of the state," and less baggage. We appreciate all that AtMP does to carve out space for different ways of loving, different ways of being family, and different ways of living in this complex society we're part of.

*Dakota Butterfield  
Cambridge, MA*



Alternatives  
to Marriage  
PROJECT

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## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Six years ago, when my partner, Marshall Miller, and I went looking for an organization for unmarried people, we were surprised that it didn't already exist. We saw a glaring need for unmarried people to begin to see ourselves as a political constituency, for a central source of relevant information, and for community. Apparently we weren't the only ones who thought so. Since we founded AtMP, we've heard from thousands of people eager to be part of the grassroots movement for unmarried people.

The need is clearest when it comes to important policy issues, like the current debate about using welfare dollars to promote marriage among the poor. I'm very proud of AtMP's substantive critique of this policy, *Let Them Eat Wedding Rings: The Role of Marriage Promotion in Welfare Reform* (available at [www.unmarried.org/rings.html](http://www.unmarried.org/rings.html)), which we released early in 2002. The report drew media attention to the issue, has been copied and distributed by poverty-fighting groups, has been cited by policy thinktanks and in academic articles, and is now used as a text in college classrooms studying welfare policy around the country. Countering the marriage-promoting enthusiasm of the current administration in Washington is an enormous challenge. But AtMP's perspective, combined with profound skepticism from many sociologists, economists, journalists, activists, and the American public, has unquestionably altered the national debate by providing clear, research-based arguments against the proposed policies.

A report issued by the American Law Institute was another significant development last year. This prestigious non-partisan group of lawyers, judges, and legal scholars recommended changes in family law that would give some unmarried same-sex and different-sex couples more equitable treatment in courtrooms if their relationships end. Based on ten years of study, this call from a mainstream legal organization to legitimize the bonds of unmarried relationships was front-page news. Media outlets including *USA Today* and Salon.com turned to AtMP for reaction to the report.

Finally, I am delighted to report the publication of Marshall's and my book, *Unmarried to Each Other: The Essential Guide to Living Together as an Unmarried Couple*, as the year drew to a close. Psychologist and relationship expert Dr. John Gottman said, "Finally, a book that recognizes that non-marital relationships can be as valuable and as filled with love as marriages, and that demands the equality they deserve." It's available in bookstores, but of course we hope you'll buy your copy through AtMP, to support all the work that awaits us in the year ahead. Thank you for your invaluable help in getting us this far.



I just think of ourselves as fortunate: We're in a happy, supportive, healthy, and loving relationship. Funny that some people seem to focus on the fact that it just happens to be a same-sex, interracial, international couple! We're not legally married (we cannot be), but we are life partners.

When I fought for same-sex benefits at my company, they gave us domestic partnership benefits. The first person I knew to take advantage of them was a woman in my department who was cohabiting with her boyfriend. He had an emergency appendectomy, and was covered by her insurance! I really felt like I made a difference. AtMP, thankfully, is doing the same thing.

*Erik Ochsner  
New York, NY*

## WHAT IS AtMP?

### Mission Statement

The Alternatives to Marriage Project advocates for equality and fairness for unmarried people, including people who choose not to marry, cannot marry, or live together before marriage. We provide support and information for this fast-growing constituency, fight discrimination on the basis of marital status, and educate the public and policymakers about relevant social and economic issues. We believe that marriage is only one of many acceptable family forms, and that society should recognize and support healthy relationships in all their diversity. AtMP is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

## WHO IS AtMP?

Our members include single people and those in relationships; young cohabitators and senior citizens; heterosexual people and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) ones; some who live alone and others in multiple-adult families; unmarried-for-lifers and people saving up for a wedding, and lots of married supporters. We are united by shared experiences and the belief that social and economic equity should not be tied to marital status. Founded in 1998, AtMP now has over 6,000 households on its mailing list, representing all 50 states and four dozen countries.

## WHY AtMP NOW?

### Marriage is no longer the central institution of American family life.

- The average American now spends the majority of his or her life unmarried.
- Forty-four percent of American adults are not currently married.
- One-third of babies in the United States are born to unmarried parents, and 40 percent of births to so-called "single mothers" are actually babies of cohabiting two-parent families.
- Thirty percent of American adults have never married, and the Census projects that at least 10 percent never will.



Based on the demographic trends of the last century, we can expect the percentage of unmarried families and households to continue to increase. Diverse family forms have become the norm.

**New family forms are evolving to reflect this profound social change.**

- Eleven million people in the U.S. live with an unmarried partner, according to the 2000 Census.
- The number of unmarried people living with a partner increased by 72 percent in the last decade alone, and 1,000 percent since 1960. The most significant recent increases were in the Bible Belt and Midwestern states.
- Same-sex couples make up over 600,000 homes in the United States, with gay, lesbian, or bisexual same-sex couples living in 99 percent of American counties.
- An increasing proportion of children are born to parents who live together but are not married.
- Most couples who marry today live together first.

**The Alternatives to Marriage Project is the voice of this emerging constituency.**

Unmarried people have begun to recognize ourselves as a community and political constituency with experiences, challenges, and needs in common. AtMP tells the truth about unmarried people: the many forms our families assume; the experiences unique to our marital status; the profound commitments many of our relationships represent, the discrimination we face, and the social change we embody and champion.



**WHY AtMP NOW?**

## AtMP'S ADVOCACY HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT

Deep inadequacies and inconsistencies in the laws that affect unmarried families persist in every state. For example:

- Federal benefits for the families of those killed in the September 11th attacks remain largely unavailable to domestic partners.
- Unmarried employees pay Social Security taxes, but are denied Social Security benefits when a life partner dies. Moreover, unlike married workers, we are not entitled to unpaid leave to care for a seriously ill partner or family member.
- Federal initiatives currently seek to divert monies from safety-net programs for the poor into marriage promotion.
- Americans are not permitted to petition for unmarried partners to immigrate, which forces some couples to marry (if they have this option) and others to live apart, or move to a country with more equitable immigration laws.
- Marital status discrimination in housing, insurance, and employment remains legal on the federal level and in most states.
- Same-sex couples are denied the right to marry in every state.\* Others are also unable to marry, including those in relationships or more than two people, and some senior citizens and disabled people who would lose critical benefits if they did so.

Compared to family policy in many European countries, where the goal is to recognize and support a much broader range of family forms, the United States has a long way to go. AtMP has begun to fill a critical niche in national discussions, offering an alternative perspective about the nature of "family." As our numbers grow, so does our power to shape that debate.

*\* As this report goes to print, we are anxiously awaiting the decision of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, which could make the state the first to legalize same-sex marriage.*



## 2002 NEWS OF NOTE

### January

- ➔ AtMP releases *Let Them Eat Wedding Rings: The Role of Marriage Promotion in Welfare Reform*, which makes the case that welfare dollars should be used to help people get out of poverty, not to promote marriage. Sent to key policymakers and members of Congress, the report is received enthusiastically by advocates for the poor, university faculty, and the media.
- AtMP Executive Director Dorian Solot speaks at the Jewish Public Forum's New York City seminar on The Future of Family and Tribe.

### February

- The Bush administration proposes diverting \$300 million in welfare dollars to promote marriage among poor families.
- A national poll finds that less than 3 percent of registered voters believe that a principal goal of the welfare system should be to promote marriage and discourage births to unmarried parents.
- ➔ Solot debates marriage promotion in welfare reform with Family Research Council spokesperson Genevieve Wood on the Fox News Channel show *On the Record with Greta Van Susteren*.

### March

- The National Center for Health Statistics reports that just over one-third of births are to unmarried parents.

### April

- AtMP celebrates its fourth anniversary. Between April 1998 and April 2002, AtMP's mailing list has grown from a mailing list of a few dozen households to over 5,000.
- Solot speaks about "Families Without Wedding Rings" at the annual conference of the Illinois Conference on Family Relations, and about children in cohabiting families at the annual conference of the Council on Contemporary Families in New York City.
- One in every six large U.S. companies now offers health benefits to its workers' same-sex domestic partners, a dramatic rise from one in eight the year before, according to human resources consulting firm William M. Mercer.

We have lived together for two years, and would love so much to be married. But due to circumstances beyond our control, we cannot. We love each other, and God, and we try to grow in a spiritual way.

To me, the most important aspect of the Alternatives to Marriage Project is finding the support and understanding of others in the same situation. Society, churches and our government need to be more sympathetic of couples' hardships, and reasons for not marrying in the traditional sense of the word. We are loving people too, with the same desires and commitments as they. Your project gives us the courage to carry on, and know we are just as whole as they.

Anita Marie Bozelli  
Chesapeake, VA





It seems clear to me that same-sex marriage is not something I will see in my lifetime, but working toward equality without the official name of marriage seems possible. The work that AtMP does is interesting from so many angles, from addressing heterosexual couples who choose not to marry, to debating laws that encourage single mothers to marry even if this is not in the best interest of the mother or the children. I look forward to the AtMP-Talk listserv digests because the members bring so many different perspectives to the table.

Martha Ehrenfeld  
San Francisco, CA



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## 2002 NEWS OF NOTE

### May

- The popular college text *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in Human Sexuality* includes the Alternatives to Marriage Project's "Ten Problems (Plus One Bonus Problem) With the National Marriage Project's Cohabitation Report" and an article by board member Ashton Applewhite critiquing covenant marriage.
- Solot's article "No Ring To It: Considering A Less-Married Future" is published in the online journal of the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership.

### June

- ➔ AtMP is featured in a seven-minute segment on NPR's Morning Edition.
- The *Providence Journal Sunday Magazine* runs a cover story on the Alternatives to Marriage Project, featuring several AtMP member families.
- AtMP releases a press release, "Unmarried Men Not Commitmentphobes, Contrary To Stereotype," questioning the conclusions of a new report from the National Marriage Project. Though the National Marriage Project calls its report on young men "Why Men Won't Commit," the Census shows that 75 percent of men have married by age 35.

### July

- Responding to inaccurate media reports about a study from the Centers for Disease Control on marriage and cohabitation, AtMP releases a fact sheet clarifying what the study found about a potential link between cohabitation and divorce ([www.unmarried.org/cdc2002.html](http://www.unmarried.org/cdc2002.html)). Solot is quoted in a national Associated Press article about the study.
- ➔ On the Fox News program *The O'Reilly Factor*, Solot debates Assistant Secretary for Health and Human Services Wade Horn about the best way to help American children and families. The segment airs repeatedly over the next several months as part of a "Best of the O'Reilly Factor" news segment.

### August

- AtMP completes a record-setting quarter. Website hits spike upwards, and the mailing list increases by 15 percent during the three-month period.
- U.S. Census data shows that the number of households that consist of an unmarried man and woman over age 55 increased 60 percent between 1990 and 2000. Solot is quoted in a national Associated Press article on cohabitation among seniors and featured on CBS's *The Early Show*.



**September**

- A generous group of AtMP supporters declare a challenge: They will match all donations of \$50 or more postmarked by December 31, 2002, up to a total of \$10,000.
- *The New York Times* joins the 10 percent of U.S. newspapers that publish announcements of same-sex unions along with engagements and marriages.

**October**

- AtMP makes the transition from being an all-volunteer organization to paying its executive director.

**November**

- ➔ *Unmarried to Each Other: The Essential Guide to Living Together as an Unmarried Couple* by Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller is published. Based on over 100 interviews with people in unmarried relationships, the book is the most comprehensive, supportive book ever written about cohabitation.
- Present and prospective AtMPers meet and mingle at fundraising houseparties in Boston and New York. The New York party is written up in *The New Yorker's* Talk of the Town section.
- AtMP unveils a new, more professional logo.
- The Red Cross is the first national relief agency to provide detailed policies and procedures on how to respect and verify same-sex and different-sex unmarried relationships in order to determine eligibility for disaster assistance.

**December**

- AtMP holds its first houseparty in the Washington, D.C. area.
- The American Law Institute releases a report calling for major changes in the legal consideration of unmarried relationships, both same-sex and different-sex. Ten years in the making, the report is widely expected to set guidelines for family lawyers and courts nationwide.
- The year ends with a 66% increase in our mailing list, from 3,000 households to over 5,000.
- ➔ AtMP's donors meet the matching challenge, surpassing our \$10,000 goal by more than \$2,000, and setting a new AtMP record for donations received in a four-month period.



I live with two lifepartners in a committed, loving relationship. We are planning to have a commitment ceremony, and are looking forward to kids. We keep house, share hobbies and dreams, give comfort, advice, and laughter. Often we forget how unusual we are. But when we discuss our fears of having a child taken away merely because someone doesn't like our "lifestyle," then the sting of discrimination based on family structure comes home.

I like ATMP because it is not about promoting one particular way to do family. It is about recognizing that there are many many ways, and that our government shouldn't be in the business of favoring one of them. Content, not form, determines a healthy family.

*Miriam Axel-Lute  
New York, NY*



## GETTING OUR MESSAGE OUT

Disseminating information about the latest issues facing unmarried couples is a crucial part of AtMP's work. Our fast-growing media presence is our primary tool for catalyzing cultural change and increasing understanding of family diversity. A goal for the year was to increase our visibility on national television, since that's how most Americans learn about contemporary issues. Building on last year's success using new Census data on unmarried partners as a springboard, this year we doubled AtMP's national television appearances. Once again, we also had significant radio and print exposure.

AtMP staff, volunteers, and members appeared in the following media in 2002. The list is incomplete, as sometimes we provide interviews but are not able to confirm whether the interview makes it into the final article or feature. Many articles, such as those by the Associated Press, appeared in hundreds of newspapers.

### Television

CNN news  
 CNN Talkback Live  
 Debates Debates (PBS)  
 MSNBC Dayside News  
 The O'Reilly Factor (Fox News Channel)  
*On the Record with Greta Van Susteren*  
 (Fox News Channel)  
*The Early Show* (CBS)  
*Wedding Advice* documentary

*Boston Phoenix*  
*Buffalo News*  
*Charleston Daily Mail*  
*Chicago Sun-Times*  
*Courier-Post* (New Jersey)  
*Daily Oklahoman*  
*Daily Star* (Oneonta, New York)  
*Daily Sundial* (California State -  
 Northridge)  
*Daily Universe* (Brigham Young  
 University)  
*Dallas Morning News*  
*Detroit Free Press*  
*Eyeweekly* (Toronto)  
*Library Journal*  
*Minneapolis Star-Tribune*  
*National Health Policy Forum Issue Brief*  
*New Mexico Associated Press*  
*New York Post*

*The New Yorker*  
*Omaha World Herald*  
*Oregonian*  
*Providence Journal Sunday Magazine*  
*Santa Fe New Mexican*  
*Sacramento Bee*  
*Salt Lake Tribune*  
*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*  
*Seattle Times*  
*Sojourner*  
*South End News*  
*South Florida Sun-Sentinel*  
*Tuscaloosa News*  
*USA Today*  
*UU World magazine*  
*Washington Associated Press*  
*Washington Times*  
*Z Magazine*

### Print Media

*Asian Reporter* (Portland)  
*Associated Press* (national)  
*Bergen Record*  
*Best's Review*  
*Bitch*  
*BiWomen*  
*Boston Globe*

**Radio**

- The Agenda (Vancouver)
- Arnie Arneson Show (Minneapolis/St. Paul)
- Arnie Arneson Show (New Hampshire)
- Brian Lehrer Show (New York)
- Brian's Beat (Massachusetts)
- Chris Moore Show (Pittsburgh)
- CNN Radio
- Conversations with Tom Clark (Wisconsin Public Radio)
- Doug Stephan's Good Day
- Evergreen Radio (Seattle)
- Fresh Fruit (Minneapolis/St. Paul)
- Gary Nolan Show (Radio America)
- Gill Gross Show (Los Angeles)
- John Carlson Show (Seattle)
- KGO (San Francisco)
- Let's Talk Long Island
- Makin' Bacon (XM Radio)
- Morning Edition (National Public Radio)
- Ollie North Show
- Radio Health Journal (Iowa)
- The Sterling Show (Columbus)
- Stirling Faux Show (Vancouver)
- Sunday Morning Magazine (Seattle)
- Tony Show (Michigan)
- Voice of America, China branch
- WDAO (Dayton)
- WGY (Albany)
- WJZD (Gulfport, Mississippi)
- WOR Morning Show (New York)

**Online Publications**

- DiscoveryHealth.com
- DivorceMagazine.com
- Frontline's *Let's Get Married* documentary website
- HealthScout
- HipMama.com



## INTERNS

In 2002 AtMP was lucky to have a stellar group of talented interns who helped with daily administrative work and worked on major projects. We couldn't have done it without (top to bottom):

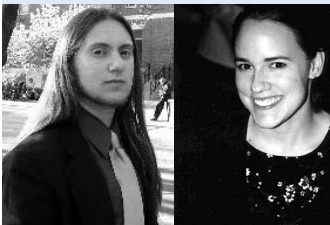
Laurie Nelson (*graduate student, University of Notre Dame*)

Liesel Kuhr (*Kenyon College*)

Anna Levin (*Oberlin College*)

Tucker Lieberman (*recent graduate, Brown University*)

Meaghan Lamarre (*recent graduate, Lewis & Clark College*)



## GOALS

We plan to use the momentum and capital acquired during our first five years to reach farther in 2003. The Alternatives to Marriage Project will continue to:

### **Advance a family diversity perspective in the media:**

- Maintain our high-visibility position in print and radio, and continue to increase our television exposure.
- Expand the pool of "My Story" volunteers so we can match journalists anywhere in the country with local unmarried people willing to share their experiences.
- Release several reports currently in progress. One documents support in the Christian church for cohabitation and family diversity; another sets out accurate social science about cohabitation.

### **Inform and nurture unmarried community:**

- Expand and redesign our website, making it easier for visitors to find the information they need.
- Support the startup of local AtMP chapters.
- Launch online messageboards that will allow people to share experiences, stories, and advice.
- Release an up-to-date fact sheet on domestic partner health benefits, one of the topics about which unmarried people most often have questions.
- Reach out to the fast-growing constituency of seniors.
- Expand our grassroots organizing with campaigns like our extremely effective nationally-distributed flyer that read "Your neighbors have discovered the Alternatives to Marriage Project. Have you?"

### **Ensure that unmarried opinions are heard:**

- Continue to spotlight the political and ethical flaws inherent in programs that use welfare dollars to promote marriage.
- Notify our members of local issues affecting unmarried people and encourage them to contact their legislators and write letters to the editor.
- Lay the groundwork for a national conference on unmarried issues and family diversity.
- Publish a historical timeline that shows how monogamous marriage is a relatively recent invention.

## LIST OF DONORS

AtMP's work in 2002 was sustained almost entirely by individuals who gave generously because they believe in our mission. Special thanks to the generous team of matching donors who challenged AtMP's supporters to contribute a total of \$10,000 to be matched, and to all those who rose to the challenge by sending gifts. We are also grateful for our Circle of Friends, donors who give \$100 or more, providing the foundation that is essential to building a vibrant, action-oriented national organization.

### Visionary (\$5,000+)

Catherine E. Reuben

### Benefactors (\$1,000 - \$4,999)

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 Dozens of "My Story" volunteers who  
 shared their stories with journalists  
 throughout the year

*We have made every effort to report gifts from donors accurately. Thank you for contacting us if you discover an error or omission.*



### **VOLUNTEERS**

The people who volunteer their time, energy, and passion are vital to our ability to carry out our mission. In 2002, volunteers prepared mailings; designed, wrote, and edited reports and our new logo; provided legal, financial, and strategic advice, edited news for the *Alternatives to Marriage Update*, hosted and helped at houseparties, updated our website; were interviewed by reporters, and contributed in numerous other ways.



## **LIST OF DONORS**



