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## Strong Fathers: Courts Reinforcing Responsible Fatherhood

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The Strong Fathers program is funded by the North Carolina Division of Social Services with a grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services (Family Violence Prevention and Services Act).

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## Responsible Fatherhood

- “You can’t hold them accountable without engaging them with their children—safely and in a productive way.”
  - Women’s Advocate
    - (Francis, 2008, p. 120)

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## Responsible Fatherhood: Men’s Views

- “Sets a bad example.”
  - Participant about impact of domestic violence on his children
- “Lead a better life for them”
  - Participant’s goal for himself as a father
- “To be a lot nicer to [prior partner]”
- “To be a better husband to [current wife]”
  - Participant’s goals with his children’s mothers

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### Strong Fathers Program

- Psycho-educational group to help men relate in safe and caring ways to their children, partners, and other family members.
- Voluntary, no fee, family incentives (e.g., zoo tickets), transportation support, refreshments
- Guidance from Family Violence Prevention Fund (Futures Without Violence), Caring Dads, EMERGE, and EVOLVE

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### Program Curriculum

- Designed by the Center for Child and Family Health in Durham
- Assumes
  - men have strengths as fathers
  - improving how men relate to their children also improves how they relate to their intimate partners
- Includes measures to assess the men's progress
- Has 20 sessions

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### Curricular Training and Fidelity

- Center for Child and Family Health provided training and support
- Group facilitators with strengths in:
  - group work
  - understanding of dynamics of coercive control and impact of childhood trauma
- Strong fidelity to the curriculum

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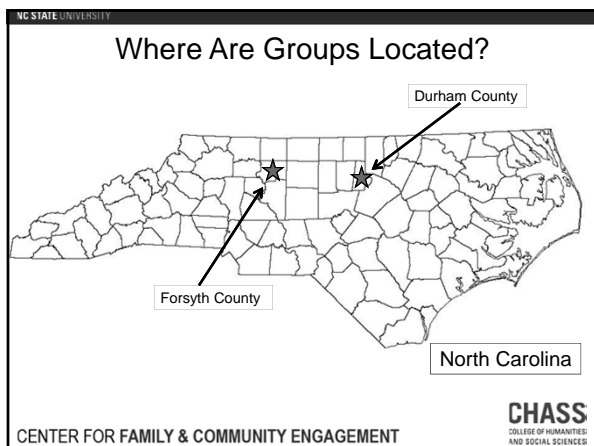
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**Strong Fathers Program Groups**

- First group implemented in 2009 by Family Services, Inc. (FSI), in Forsyth County
  - To date, FSI has completed five groups, and a sixth group is ongoing
  - Referrals invited from Forsyth, Davie, and Stokes
- In 2012, the Center for Child & Family Health partnered with Durham County Department of Social Services to start a group in Durham County

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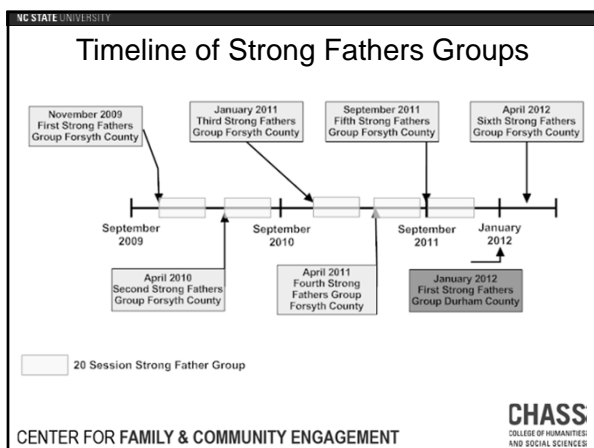
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### Referral Criteria

- Eligibility
  - Father or male caretaker whose children are receiving child welfare services and who has been *physically or emotionally abusive toward his partner*
- Ineligibility
  - Father or male caretaker identified as committing child sexual abuse and/or had court orders stipulating no contact with their children

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### Men with Court Order Stipulating No Contact with Partner

- 7 fathers had a current domestic violence protective order (50B) against them.
- 28 did not have a current domestic violence protective order (50B).

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### Initial Challenges: Recruitment and Retention

- Typical for new programs
- Focus group recommendations:
  - Publicizing program
  - Broadening referral sources
  - Court orders into program
  - Monitoring and reinforcing attendance
  - Keeping cases open
  - Open rather than closed group format

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### Group Formats

- Closed Group – Initial Forsyth approach
  - Fathers begin and finish with the same cohort of men
  
- Open Group
  - Fathers may enter and exit at any point
  
- Hybrid Group – Current Forsyth approach
  - Mix of open and closed format to facilitate enrollments while covering curriculum
  - Orientation of entering men to prior sessions

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### Participants

1. Diversity in age, race/ethnicity, education, employment, # of children, # of households
2. Enrollments:
  - 7 men in 1<sup>st</sup> group while 16 men in 6<sup>th</sup> group

1. In first five groups, 35 men attending program
2. Increase in percentage of completers over time

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
43.75%	66.67%	80.00%

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### Retention Matters

- Quasi-experiments have repeatedly shown that violent reoffending is associated with failure to complete programs for men who abuse their partners (Gondolf, 2009; Heckert & Gondolf, 2005).

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## Reputation

Initially seen as a “soft program.”

Now viewed as improving men’s relationships with their children, families, and workers.

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## Data Sources

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graph TD; A[NC DSS  
1, 2, 3 & 4 Years After] --> B[Child(ren)]; A --> C[Fathers]; B --> D[21 Quantitative Instruments  
(500+ Variables)]; B --> E[20 Qualitative Instruments]; C --> F[Child's Mother]; C --> G[Community Focus Groups]; F --> H[Pre-interview]; F --> I[Post-interview]; G --> J[Durham]; G --> K[Forsyth];
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## Important Evaluation Point!

- No data sources indicate that mothers and children are adversely affected by the Strong Fathers Program.

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## Example of Father Self-Rating Log




**Strong Fathers Program**

**Weekly Parenting Log Session #2**

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date You Filled Out This Log: \_\_\_\_\_




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Think back over the last week and in your own words write down what happened and how you felt.

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1. This week, the one thing I felt best about as a father was:
2. The thing that will be hardest about this program for me is:
3. This week, my biggest struggle as a father was:

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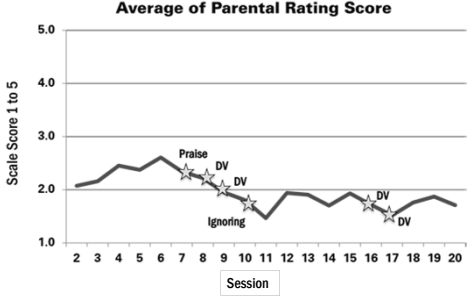
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## Fathers' Self-Rated Parenting Scores

**Average of Parental Rating Score**



Session	Scale Score (1-5)	Annotation
2	2.0	
3	2.2	
4	2.4	
5	2.3	
6	2.5	
7	2.4	Praise
8	2.2	DV
9	2.1	DV
10	2.0	DV
11	1.5	Ignoring
12	1.8	
13	1.9	
14	1.8	
15	1.9	
16	1.8	DV
17	1.5	DV
18	1.8	
19	1.9	
20	1.8	

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## Fathers' Self-Ratings

- “My daughter wasn’t feeling well the other night . . . . So I got up, picked her up and rocked her to sleep. It made me feel Real good that I was there for her.”
  - Session 2: Father who rated himself as a 5
- “not seeing my son”
  - Session 10: Father who rated himself as a 1

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## A Mother's Perspective

- *"During the program there were some things brought out that affected him in a good way...Evaluating himself and seeing where he could be better."*

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## Child Development Measure







NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Please read each statement. Circle *T* if you think the statement is True (*T*=True) or circle *F* if you think the statement is False (*F*=False).

1. It's possible to spoil babies by picking them up too much.	<i>T</i> <i>F</i>
2. A baby usually cries for no particular reason.	<i>T</i> <i>F</i>
3. Most babies start to crawl around the age of 2.	<i>T</i> <i>F</i>
4. Toddlers who feel afraid in their houses might start talking or walking later than children who don't feel afraid.	<i>T</i> <i>F</i>
5. Kids learn how to handle emotions from their parents.	<i>T</i> <i>F</i>
6. A two year old that doesn't follow directions is just trying to make you mad.	<i>T</i> <i>F</i>

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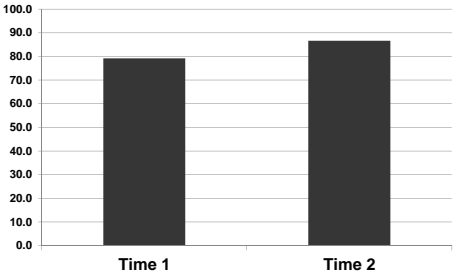
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## 6. Child Development Scores

### Mean Child Development Score



Time	Mean Score
Time 1	~78.0
Time 2	~85.0

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### Dads Learning to Engage Responsibly

This week, the one thing I felt best about as a father was:

Sessions		
6	9	14
"Spending time with my son."	"Being able to talk and have a conversation with my spouse, without raising my voice"	"Teaching my son about being responsible about his own action[s] and blaming others. He (the son) understood me as well and said 'ok dad, I understand.'"

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### Purpose of Interviews with Mothers

- To learn about:
  - women’s experiences of parenting in the context of domestic violence
  - women’s perceptions of how her (ex-) partner relates to his children during and after domestic violence

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### Impact from Mother’s Perspective

- “There has not been any verbal abuse since he began medication and attending the class. He was really committed to making some type of change.”*

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### Impact from Mothers' Perspectives

- *"He saw a different perspective...attending the class allowed him to reflect and get a different perspective of what he was perceived as."*
- *"He's trying to do more understanding and respecting. Before, he wasn't trying. He didn't have the tools to try."*

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### Impact from Workers' Experiences

- Father knows how to take part in child and family team meeting.
- Father was granted custody of his child who had earlier been removed from her mother.
- Father greatly improved relationship with his child and understood now how to reach out for ongoing support from Social Services.

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### Judges Reinforcing Participation

- Checking service plans for father engagement
- Reinforcing keeping cases open to provide services to fathers
- Ordering father to program
- Program deciding on batterer intervention or fathering program

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For More Information Please Visit:

<http://cface.chass.ncsu.edu/fathering.php>  
Email: [strong\\_fathers@ncsu.edu](mailto:strong_fathers@ncsu.edu)

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