



**STRONG FATHERS
PROGRAM**

SPRING 2012

**CENTER FOR FAMILY &
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

CHASS
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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WHAT IS STRONG FATHERS?

Strong Fathers is a group for men referred by child welfare and with a history of domestic violence. Its aim is to help men relate in safe and caring ways to their children, partners, and other family members. In group, the men learn about parenting techniques and have the opportunity to talk with other men about good ways of fathering and taking leadership in caring for their families.

"The class impacted him in a way that allowed him to stop and think, 'I wasn't really acting in a way I should have.'"

- Mother Interview

WHY DO STRONG FATHERS MATTER?

- They provide time and support.
- **They show children how to treat others with respect.**
- They model non-violence.
- **They show that they care about their children and want them and their mothers to be safe.**

WHO PROVIDES THE PROGRAM?

The curriculum for Strong Fathers was developed by the Center for Child and Family Health in Durham, North Carolina. The groups are facilitated by Family Services, Inc. in Winston-Salem and by the Center for Child and Family Health with Durham County Department of Social Services. The Center for Family and Community Engagement at North Carolina State University



is evaluating the program. Strong Fathers 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).

WHAT DOES THE CURRICULUM COVER?

The curriculum integrates parenting education with raising awareness of the impact of domestic violence on children and their mothers. The curriculum also addresses how the men's childhood experiences affect how they relate to their children and their partners. The goal is for men to become strong fathers who work with the children's mothers to promote positive child development.

HOW WAS THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPED?

The curriculum draws upon other models that have been developed to reduce child maltreatment and intimate partner violence. With permission, the curriculum has adapted concepts, materials, and exercises from *Fathering After Violence*, developed by the Family Violence Prevention Fund (www.endabuse.org); *EVOLVE*, developed by Fernando Mederos; and *Caring Dads*, developed by Katreena Scott, Karen Francis, Claire Crooks, and Tim Kelly (www.caringdadsprogram.com). *Caring Dads* was pilot tested at EMERGE, a batterers intervention program in Cambridge, Massachusetts, under the leadership of David Adams.



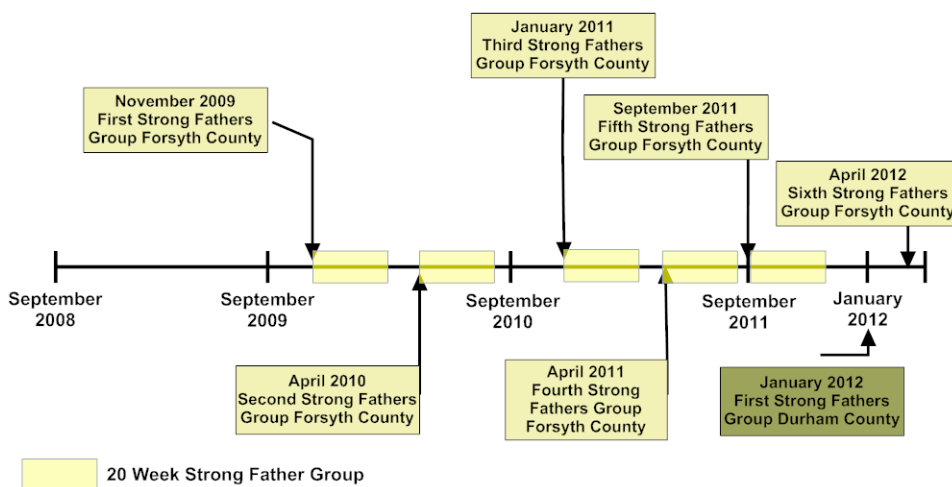
HOW IS THE PROGRAM EVALUATED?

The curriculum includes exercises in which the men set goals for themselves, rate their own growth as fathers, and complete pre- and post-tests of their

knowledge of child development. The evaluation includes input from the group facilitators, the mothers of the children, the social workers, and other community partners. In addition, Social Services data are analyzed.

HOW OFTEN IS THE GROUP HELD?

Since the program began in the fall of 2009, Family Services, Inc. has completed five groups. The Center for Child and Family Health and Durham County Department of Social Services have initiated one group. The groups have



20 sessions that are two hours in length and are held in the evening. Some groups have used a closed-group format with a set beginning and

ending date; other groups have used an open-group format. The open groups have individual sessions scheduled before and after the group to accommodate men entering and exiting the program at different points and in order to complete evaluation measures.

WHO HAS BEEN ENROLLED IN THE PROGRAM AND STAYED IN THE PROGRAM?

For the completed groups, 35 men enrolled. Out of these 35 men, 16 men completed the program, 13 men partially completed the program, and 4 did not attend any sessions. One man returned later to complete the group. Completing the group is defined as attending at least 65% of the sessions. Among the 29 men who attended, the majority was under 40 years, had

1- 2 children, was living apart from their children all or some of the time, was African American or White, and did not have a current protective order. The referred men were split in terms of being employed, having a history of child maltreatment, and having been exposed to domestic violence between their parents/guardians. To increase referrals,

Family Services, Inc. expanded referral	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
sources beyond Social Services to	43.75%	66.67%	80.00%

court and adopted the open format that permits enrollments on an ongoing basis. Overtime, the percentage of men staying in the program steadily increased from 44% to 80%.

WHO COMPLETES THE PROGRAM?

“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.”

- Mother Interview

The men who completed the program shared similar demographic characteristics to the men who completed the program in part or not at all. The three groups were also comparable on the extent to which they had protective orders, indicating more recent domestic violence. However, the men completing the program were less likely to identify themselves as the victims

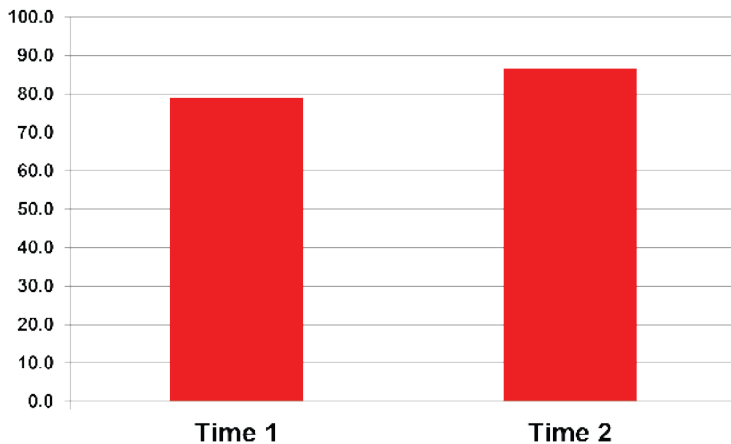
of childhood maltreatment and as exposed to domestic violence between their parents/guardians. In addition, they were less likely to identify themselves as having used substances or alcohol in the previous six months.

WHAT IS THE PROGRAM’S IMPACT?

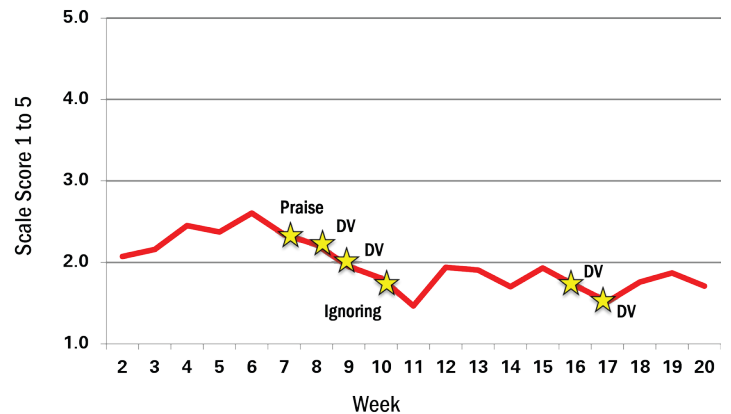
Over the course of the group, the men rated their parenting. Their self-ratings tended to start higher. These self-ratings then dipped as the men struggled to learn new

skills such as praising their children or as they reflected on the impact of domestic violence on their children. Once again the ratings climbed as the men succeeded in applying positive parenting approaches.

Mean Child Development Score



Average of Parental Rating Score



None of the data sources show increased safety risks for children and their mothers. According to the preliminary findings, the men who completed the program demonstrated:

- Increased knowledge of child development;
- Reduced abusive beliefs toward their partners;
- Capacity to set and carry out goals for themselves as fathers and partners;
- Enhanced awareness of their gains and lapses as fathers;
- Ability to identify and overcome challenges in relating to their children and the children’s mothers; and
- Maintaining or increasing the time they spent living with their children.

“He’s trying to do more understanding and respecting. Before, he wasn’t trying. He didn’t have the tools to try.”

- Mother Interview

Please visit <http://cface.chass.ncsu.edu/fathering.php> for more information

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