

See How This Oklahoma School System Uses Fathering in 15™ to Create a Strong Tomorrow for Teen Dads



Posted: 4/18/2019

By Christopher A. Brown

“I really enjoy using Fathering in 15™. I know it can be used as a self-paced program, but when dealing with teens, it’s rare that you can get them to do a self-paced resource. So, we don’t use it that way. We use it to work with teen dads one-on-one and in groups of anywhere from 2-8 dads. I really like the flexibility of being able to use it given the dynamics of my job and the time I have to work with dads in the school setting.”

—Mario Jones, Fatherhood Coordinator, Strong Tomorrows

Strong Tomorrows is the parent-education program of Tulsa Public Schools (Tulsa, OK). A public-private venture funded by the Tulsa Area United Way and the George Kaiser Family Foundation, Strong Tomorrows provides guidance, support, and information for expectant and parenting students. Its primary goal is to keep parenting students in school and on track to graduate.

The program recruits teen parents through faculty referrals. At the start of each school year, Strong Tomorrows staff meet with faculty to explain the program. When a faculty member learns about an expectant or parenting teen, they contact Strong Tomorrows staff and share the teen’s name. Then, in the case of an expectant or parenting teen dad, Mario contacts the teen directly without mentioning who referred him. He explains the program and its benefits and enrolls the teen if he wants to participate. He offers the teen an incentive called Daddy

Dollars—a point system in which they earn points for participation that they can use to purchase items for their baby.

When I interviewed Mario last month about their use of a variety of **National Fatherhood Initiative®** (NFI) programs and resources, he beamed about how helpful NFI’s online **Fathering in 15™** program has been in their effort to grow the reach of Strong Tomorrows to teen dads. As he explained, Strong Tomorrows started with an exclusive focus on teen moms. The program started in 2014 and quickly realized that they needed to serve dads, too.

So, they hired Mario as their fatherhood coordinator. The involvement of teen dads has taken off this school year. Mario has already had 50 expectant and parenting dads referred to him since last August. The daunting challenge for Mario has been, as a team of one, to serve teens who are spread out across the eight campuses he visits.

The Flexibility of Fathering in 15™

That’s where the flexibility of Fathering in 15™ helps Mario meet this challenge. Mario constantly travels from campus to campus. That amount of travel and the high school setting limits the time Mario has to meet with teens. He shared that there are three opportunities to serve expectant and parenting dads given their hectic schedules:

- During lunchtime, which lasts 25 minutes.
- During an advisory period, which lasts 40 minutes.
- During an elective class, such as gym class, that also lasts 40 minutes.

The two times when he most often works with teens are during lunchtime and an advisory period. During an advisory period, he meets with an expectant or parenting dad one-on-one in a Strong Tomorrows office on campus. He uses his laptop to take the teen through a couple of the 15-minute topics and have a robust discussion.

During lunchtime, he typically works with expectant and parenting dads in a small group. He sits with them at a table in the cafeteria, opens his laptop, and goes through one of the 15-minute topics. He generates dialogue with and among them with the “What to Ask” section of questions. (This section appears at the end of each topic and asks a dad questions that help him apply what he’s learned to his own situation.) He’ll typically ask the teens in a round-robin fashion to answer one of the questions. The teens enjoy the discussion and especially appreciate the inspirational video included in each of the 15 topics.

The Future of Strong Tomorrows

Mario and his Strong Tomorrows colleagues will deepen their work with expectant and parenting teen dads and moms around the importance of father involvement. They have acquired and been trained on [24/7 Dad®](#) and [Understanding Dad™](#). While Mario hasn't started to use 24/7 Dad®—that will likely happen soon as they plan to hire another fatherhood coordinator—the female staff recently trained on Understanding Dad® have started to run it with groups of expectant and parenting teen moms.

Do you work in a school setting and are challenged by the limited amount of time you have to serve expectant and parenting teens?

Have you thought about how to use [Fathering in 15™](#) and other NFI resources to reach the dads of students in a school system? Click [here](#) to learn how one of the largest school systems in Texas is doing just that!