



# Boot Camp for New Dads: Improving Child Outcomes through Fathers

## Project Goals

- Increase Agency Capacity for Boot Camp Services
- Increase Boot Camp for New Dads Enrollment
- Develop a Data Collection Plan

## Summary

Maternal and child health research strongly supports the role for fathers in the health of mothers and babies. However, few prenatal programs exist to prepare expectant fathers for the unique challenges they will face.

Responding to this need, the program Boot Camp for New Dads (BCND) was

developed in 1990. BCND has been replicated in 39 states, including Florida, as well as internationally.

The program provides men with information on how to ensure infant safety, support their partners before and after birth, bond with their infants, and develop a masculine view of parenting. It is unique in that past participants return with their infants to help facilitate session.



## Challenge

While the benefits associated with early paternal involvement in the lives of children are well documented, emerging research suggests that the benefits of engaged fathers start even before birth. As Alio found in a 2010 study, babies born with mothers who received positive support from the father have higher birth weights. A similar result was found by Barth in 1988, where adolescent expectant dads who participated in prenatal classes and programs had babies with higher birth weights.

Despite benefits of a dad's prenatal involvement with the mother and the expected child, fathers feel as if their concerns are secondary, causing Jordan to quip in a 1990 paper that fathers are "laboring for relevance." She found that many men reported traditional prenatal classes with their partners to be an alienating experience with too much focus on the experience of the mother. This led to a perception by many fathers that prenatal classes do not prepare men for the psychological and emotional consequences of childbirth. The result is, as Barclay and others found in 1996, the prenatal period is the most stressful stage for men in the pregnancy.

*"I can't thank you enough times for having and teaching this class. I was the 42 year old with zero baby experience. I still have my class notes in my phone and often read them again. Kendall and I enjoyed our follow up classes as the teacher helpers. Let us know if we can help in any way. Keep doing what you do....it's changing lives."*

Jeff — BCND participant

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## Solution

With this context in mind, Champions for Children (CfC), a nationally accredited non-profit agency with a mission to prevent child abuse and neglect in the Tampa Bay area, has been offering the Boot Camp for New Dads program for the past 14 years.

Coining itself as a “father-to-father” mentoring program, a typical session will host 8-14 expectant dads and will cover topics ranging from practical infant-care skills, building father-infant bonds, and fostering continued paternal involvement throughout the child’s lifespan—all while fostering an emotional-support system among the fathers. BCND also offers strategies for fathers to assist the mother, both emotionally and physically, through the pregnancy, early months of infancy, and beyond.

BCND relies on past participants, the “veteran dads,” to return with their baby to help facilitate a session. Not only is this a powerful recruitment tool, it also helps to retain the veteran dad’s engagement in the community and increase his parental confidence. Furthermore, by having veterans return, it keeps dads in contact with CfC, increasing their probability of returning to seek other services designed for fathers.

The scope of data analysis was helped tremendously by a partnership with the University of South Florida’s College of Public Health. This allowed for a thorough literature review, piloting of evaluation methods and analysis of existing data to inform planning.

## Results

A recent evaluation of the program, through both quantitative and qualitative measures, revealed overwhelming participant satisfaction in the program, with many finding the program to be extremely helpful and valuable. Few reported leaving with questions left unanswered and almost all felt that the program either met or exceeded their expectations. In fact, many wished the program was an hour longer. Furthermore, quantitative measures revealed that while the majority of our participants come from a high socioeconomic status (SES), no statistically significant differences in outcomes were found between any identifiable groups (such as income, race, education levels, etc.).

## Sustaining Success

Though data indicates BCND works for all participants, more needs to be done to attract low SES men. CfC are refining recruitment methods, as well as adding content to the class that men of a low SES might need, such as information about job training programs and public benefits. The agency is also continually seeking potential future BCND instructors from the participant base that can help increase the capacity to offer the program as well as bolster recruitment efforts.

## Special Note

Two abstracts based upon this project were submitted and accepted for poster presentation in the Maternal and Child Health Section at the 143rd APHA Annual Meeting and Exposition.

## Citations

- Barclay, L. M., Donovan, J., & Genovese, A. (1996). *A grounded theory analysis of men's experience during their partner's first pregnancy*. *Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 13(3), 12-24.
- Barth, R. P., Claycomb, M., & Loomis, A. (1988). Services to adolescent fathers. *Health & social work*, 13(4), 277-287.
- Jordan, P. L. (1990). Laboring for relevance: Expectant and new fatherhood. *Nursing research*, 39(1), 11-16.