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**March 10, 2017**

### **Blossoming Flowers**

Growing a flower can be as simple or as complex as you want it to be. Seeds have to be placed correctly into the soil, soil has to be fertile, and proper maintenance has to be in order. All seeds are not the same and require different levels of preservation which is something the planter should keep in mind. With the right care, attention, and dedication, the seed will become a beautiful flower that thrives. What if we took time to look at fatherhood the same way we do planting a flower?

Let us start by looking at the seed, the child, and its soil, the mother's womb. In the womb, a child develops primary organs and functions that allow them to live in the outside world. The infant develops physically and mentally which is why it is so important for mom to remain healthy and to try to stay in a peaceful, happy state. This is not a one-person task. It requires everyone's support, especially dad. While the child grows and gets acquainted with mom, it does so with dad. Hearing familiar voices is one of the ways an infant identifies who's who for the first few days and the rest of its life.

Diligently working to ensure the seed sprouts, you finally see that there is something rising from the soil. This is what you've been waiting for, birth of a new life. Yes, this is a milestone but the journey is not over yet. Continuing to provide necessary resources, such as water and sunlight, to the small sprout will secure a flourishing flower just the same as a dad continuing to provide loving care, attention, education, and guidance throughout everyday life.

It is well known that mothers are important when it comes to raising children but the role of the father is sometimes forgotten. Being a father has statistically shown to be a factor in the successful outcomes for children growing into adulthood. The experiences gained from having both mother and father actively involved and engaged in their child's lives is what matters most. The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse states that when fathers are involved, especially in education, children learn more, perform better in school, and exhibit healthier behavior. Even when fathers do not share a home with their children, their involvement can have a lasting, positive impact.

Darlington County First Steps' fatherhood initiative is facilitated at the Dad Cave on 307 W. Washington Street, Hartsville, SC where fathers have the space to receive services that will forward their future, equip them to be the best father possible to their family, and to be a productive member of society. The Dad Cave also serves as a safe place to share dialogue with other dads and to simply relax from the outside stresses of the world. We work to see fathers succeed as it is our belief that fathers have a significant role in ensuring they are providing an environment where seeds are growing into blossoming flowers.

*Jon Flowers, Fatherhood Specialist, operates the Dad Cave. He can be reached at [jflowers@scfirststeps.org](mailto:jflowers@scfirststeps.org) or 843-639-0245. For more information on Darlington County First Steps programs, visit [www.darlingtoncountyfirststeps.org](http://www.darlingtoncountyfirststeps.org).*