

'I couldn't turn it down': Daddy-Daughter Date Night builds memories for fathers

By Brandon Callender

Therese Daye knew that she had to keep her dream alive.

For nearly a year she'd been planning to host a Daddy-Daughter Date Night for the fathers of Durham, but the heavy rainfall wouldn't let up. A day before the Feb. 8 event was scheduled to occur, she learned that she'd no longer be able to hold it at Bethesda Elementary School.

Due to the inclement weather, Durham Public Schools made a swift call to cancel all weekend activities. After making countless phone calls and searching, she was able to secure Global Scholars Academy as the new location for an evening of dancing and games.

Daye, a counselor at E.K. Powe Elementary School, self-published her first book in 2019, "Daddy's Little Girl," about a father who works to repair a relationship with his daughter due to broken promises and a loss of trust. In her book, Daye provides parents with skills and techniques they can use to build healthy and communicative relationships with their children.

"My book has activities as well as conversation starters," Daye said. "It teaches you how you can validate your kid's feelings. A lot of the time, they're told 'Don't tell me how you feel about that.' [My book] encourages them to talk about their feelings."

Daye said she wanted to bring her book to life by hosting a "real experience for fathers and daughters in the community."

"My book celebrates relationships between fathers and daughters because it's something that all fathers and daughters should be able to experience," Daye said. "I did this in my book, and I had to bring it to life by creating this space for daddies



Jonathan Gramby plays with his daughter in the inaugural Daddy Daughter Date Night at the Global Scholars Academy on Saturday, Feb. 8. The event fostered relationships with male parental figures. (Photo by Brandon Callender)

and daughters to come and enjoy each other, to come and bond and create these special memories that we don't get all the time with life being so busy."

Durham community member Chris Rivers, who met Daye in high school, is a motivational speaker and hosted the event. Rivers made sure that the evening was focused on providing the fathers and daughters with a space to come together and show love.

"I made some mistakes in my life," Rivers said. "Though I was able to recover, I recognize that having a present father in my home could have diverted those things. Anytime there's an event that deals with fatherhood, it's something that I'm passionate about being a part of."

Rivers, who grew up in a single parent household, spoke throughout the evening about the value of fatherhood, especially for black families. Paternal relationships of all kinds were highlighted throughout the evening, including grandfathers, male guardians and stepfathers.

All through the evening, daughters volunteered their fathers to play games and gave them advice to get an edge on the other dads. They taught their dads how to steal seats in musical chairs, offered quick hula hooping demonstrations and whispered the secrets to performing the perfect Milly

Rock to try to win a dance off.

Even while losing, the dads still managed to put smiles on the kids' faces by loosening up and acting silly. Wayne Geter, who claims that he can't dance, thought it would be fun to spend a night dancing with his daughter.

"I had a daughter, but she wasn't at the age where she could participate in the events," Geter said. "When she finally turned 5 and reached that age, once I got the invite, I couldn't turn it down."

Geter, who lives in Charlotte, came all the way to Durham for the event because his daughter's mother helped Daye organize the event. Fathers from all over the state came out in support of the event because of a connection they had to it in some way.

"It's important for me to be here because I'm a father of two daughters and, most of all, I believe in making sure I represent for the dads that are here and the dads that are not here," William Speed, a Durham resident, said.

While everyone present defined fatherhood differently, they all shared a common vision of creating a better future for their children.

"Being able to give dads a space so they can learn how to be there for their daughters means a lot to me," Daye said. "I truly believe that sometimes dads just don't know. Showing them what they need to do or how they can do it is what I'm here for. I'm here to be a resource to tell you what all little girls need from their fathers."



Elroy Hervey and his daughter Amirah Parker play a game of tic-tac-toe against each other. Hervey, a Durham resident, believes that fatherhood is about making sacrifices. (Photo by Brandon Callender)