



# DADS' CONNECTION

A Group for Fathers Involved  
in Domestic Violence

*Prepared by:*

Makeda Thomas

Gordon Cone

Jennifer Puddicombe

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**Aisling Discoveries**  
Child and Family Centre

*Helping parents raise happy, healthy children.*

# Overview

- Introduction – Gord
- Program Description – Makeda
- Group Evaluation and Results – Jennifer
- Challenges and Lessons Learned – Gord
- Personal Experience – Father (previous group participant)



# What is Dads' Connection?

- A psycho-educational program for fathers with the aim of giving them information on the effects of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE on children to educate them to:
  - Realize the impact and take responsibility for their actions/behaviours
  - Rebuild trust with their children (primarily), and also with their spouse/partner
  - Break the cycle of violence or abusive behaviour patterns by learning skills and strategies to deal with communication barriers



# Background

- Requested by child welfare agencies to meet an unmet need. Therefore a partnership between Child Welfare and Aisling Discoveries.
- Funding comes from the Province of Ontario, MCYS, Community Capacity Building Program (Child Welfare Secretariat Transformation Funding).
- Funding began in 2007
- Aisling Discoveries delivers the program to residents of Toronto living east of Yonge St.
- A consultant was used to research and develop the program.
- Incorporated two evidence based programs; Fathering Without Violence, and Caring Dads.



# Program Description

- 15 Week Program
- Session duration: 90 to 110 minutes
- 8 to 10 participants per group preferred
- TTC tokens provided
- Supper provided



# Program Objectives

- Help fathers to realise the impact that domestic violence has on their children.
- To increase the safety of the children
- Help fathers decrease or eliminate any abusive behaviours they exhibit towards their partner/spouse.
- Help fathers take responsibility and accountability for their use of violence.
- Help fathers increase their respect for their partner/spouse.
- Educate fathers on their role and influence in the family.



# Interventions / Theoretical Framework

- Child-Centered Approach
- Psycho-education
- Role Plays
- Videos
- In-session exercises and homework assignments



# The Process

- Referral from child welfare agencies to Aisling Discoveries
- Pre-screening meeting
- Post-group feedback meeting
- Meetings include: father, CAS worker, and Aisling Discoveries' group co-facilitators



# Clinical Challenges and Opportunities

## Challenges

- Resistance
- Strong feelings towards child welfare agency
- Coping with the label of being abusive
- Dealing with their perception of being abused themselves

## Opportunities

- Self-reflective process
- Learn from other fathers
- Experience modeling of respectful behaviours



# How We Provide Support

- Provide a supportive environment
- Have a non-judgmental approach
- Use language the participants understand
- Normalize resistance
- Expectations are openly discussed
- Sensitivity to diversity/culture of participants
- Recognize feelings of shame or guilt and social isolation that may be associated with attending the group.



## Remember...

- The fathers are human beings with feelings.
- Many times they are repeating what they have been taught or exposed to.
- Many of the fathers were abused themselves.
- They truly love their children.
- These fathers need the opportunity to tell their side of the story; they need to be heard.
- Change is hard.

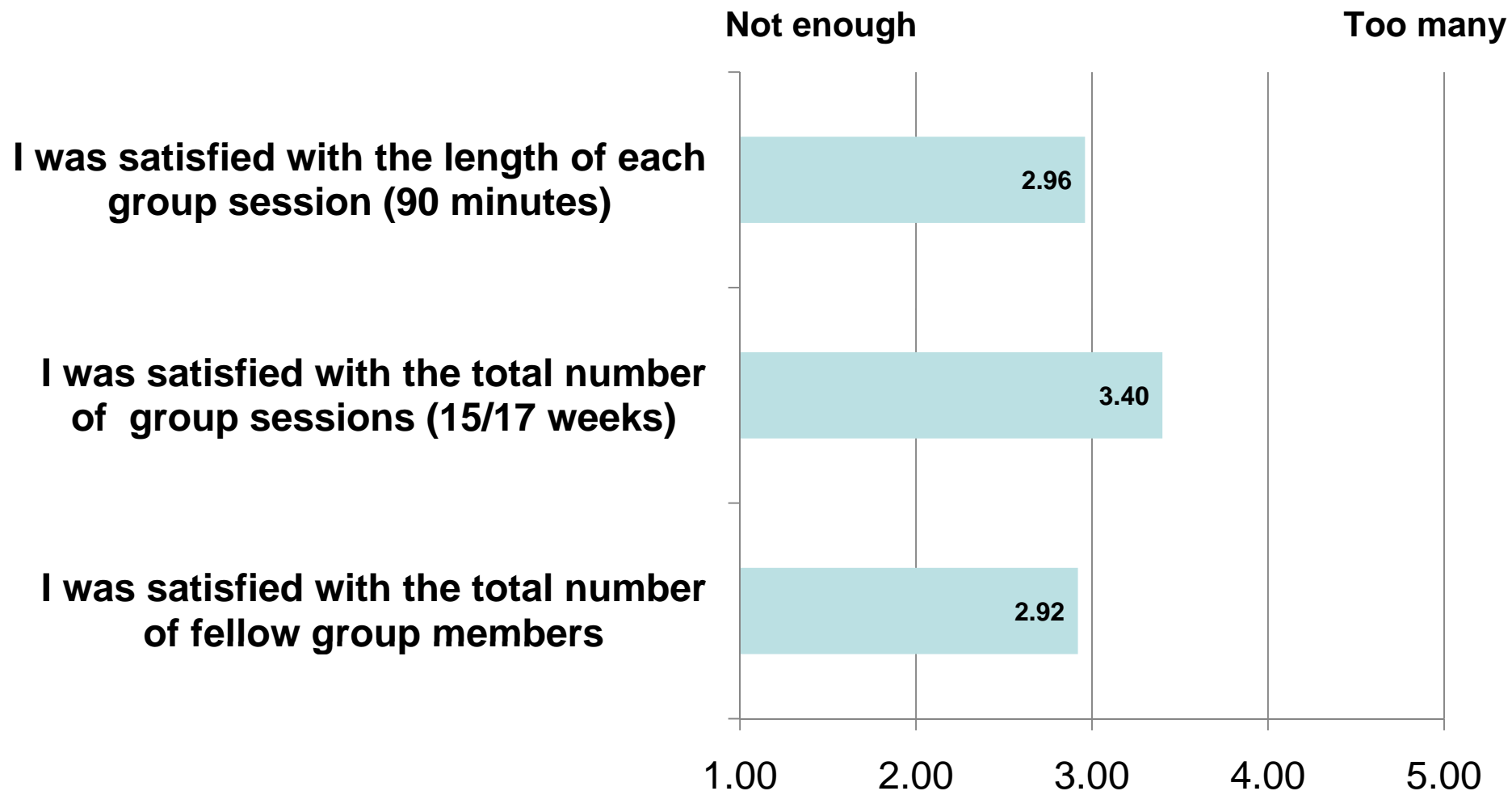


# How Do We Know the Model Works?

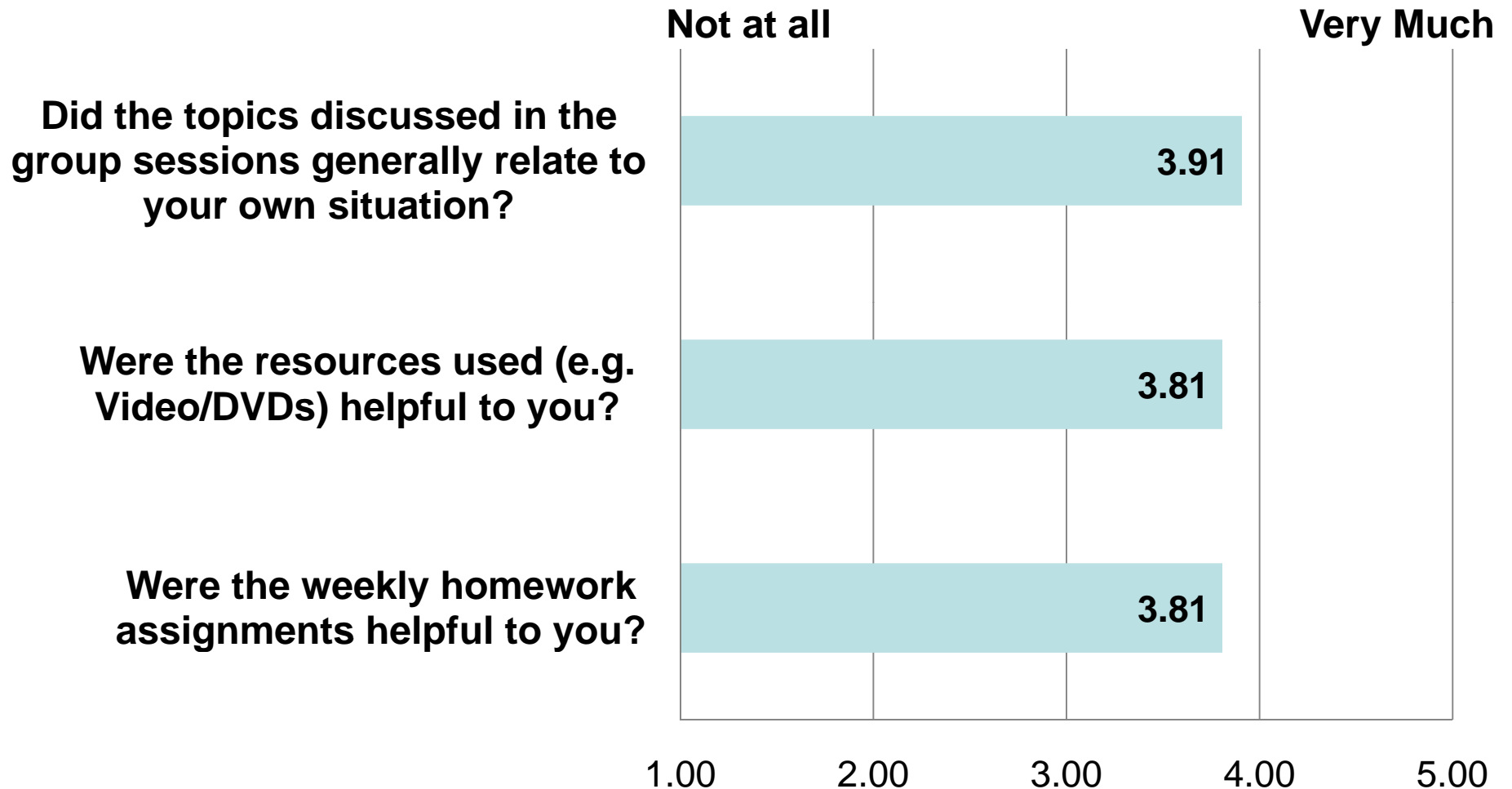
- The fathers have reported a change in their way of thinking and interacting with their children and partner/spouse.
- The majority of fathers have reported an improvement in their relationship with their children.
- Participation of fathers in the group is high.
- Good attendance and low drop out rate.



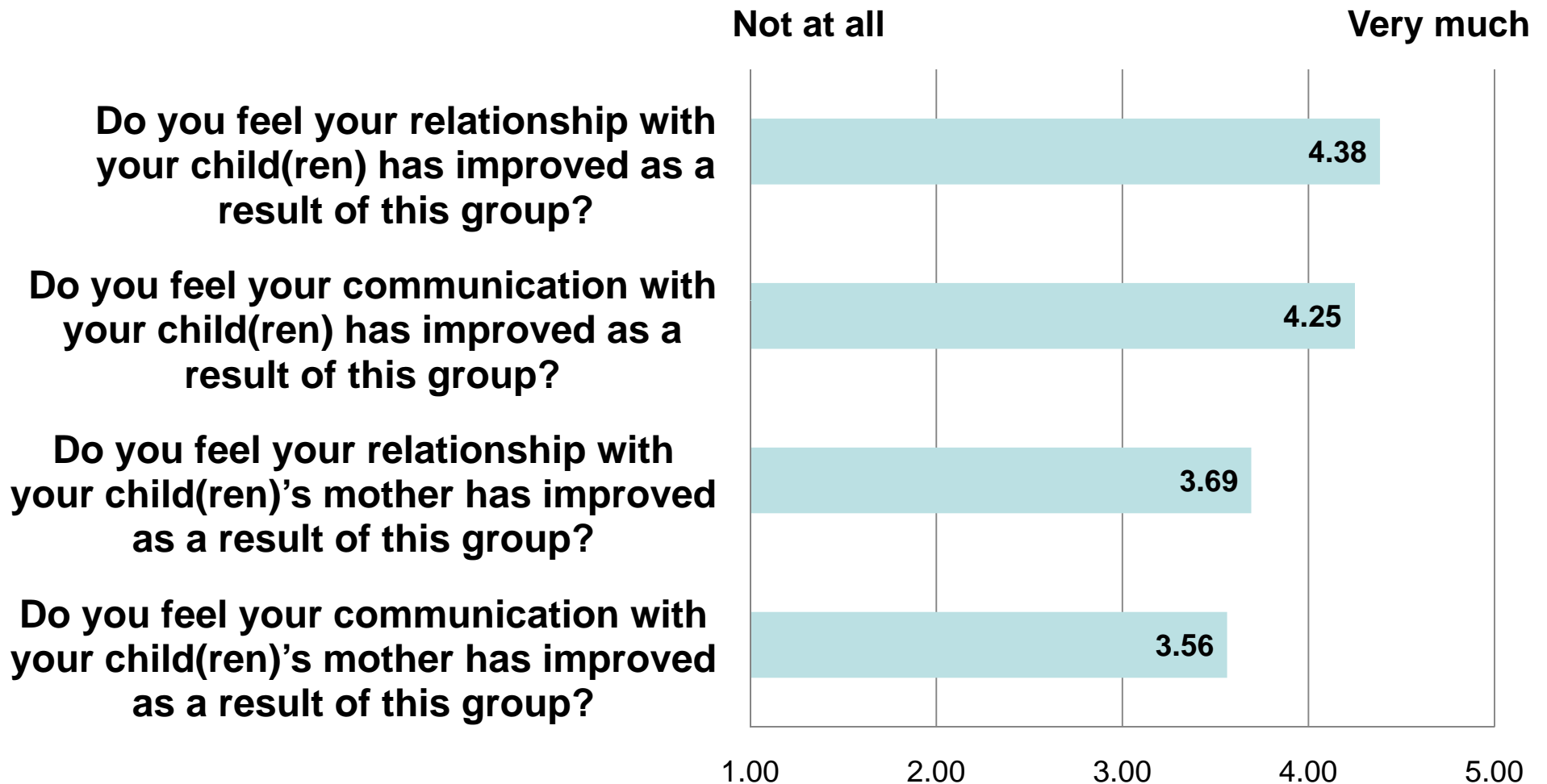
## DADS' CONNECTION GROUP SURVEY RESULTS (n=25)



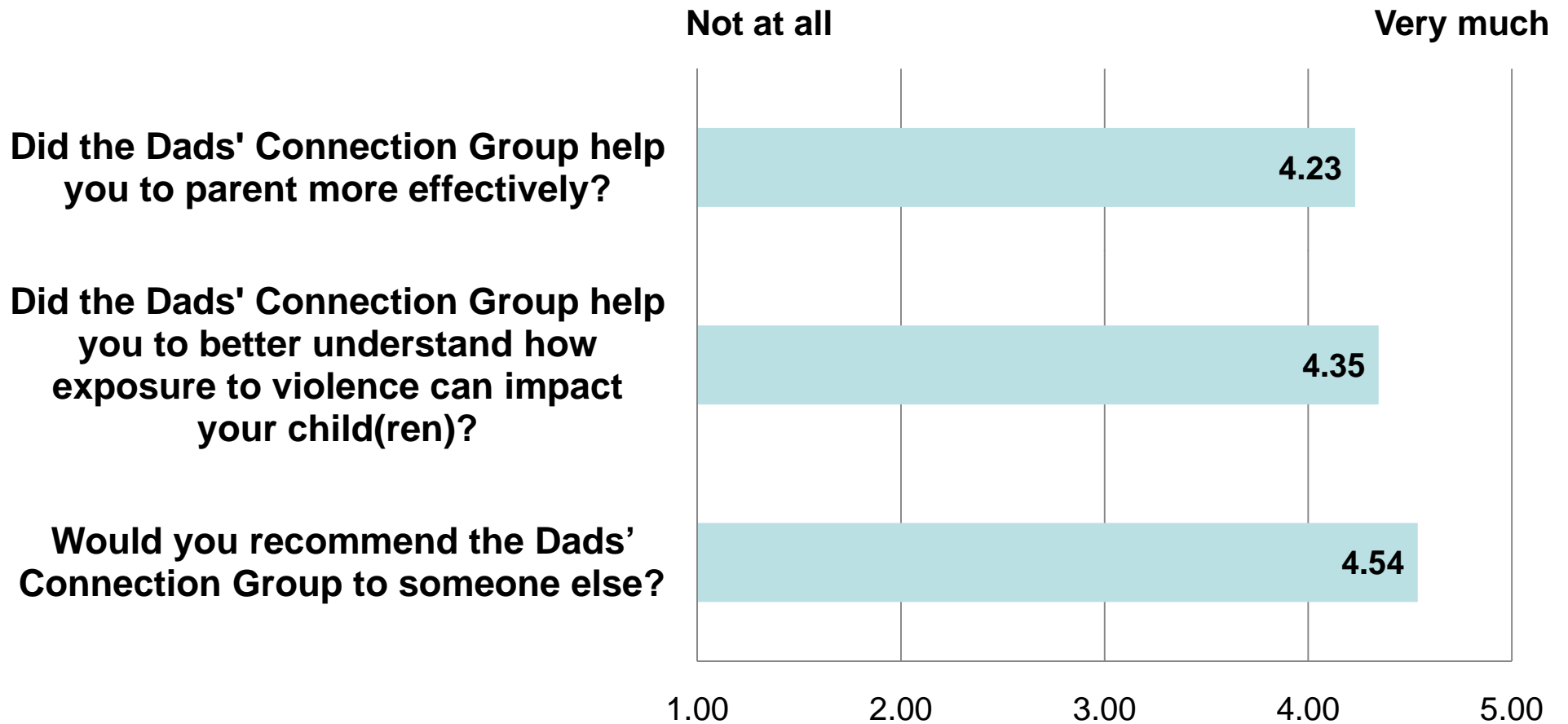
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## How has the group helped you to become a better father?

- *“I avoid raising my voice to them. I listen to them more carefully. I think first before I say something. I’m aware of my responsibilities.”*
- *“Now realize that it’s not fair to the kids to witness arguments or tension between mom and dad in the house and all that.”*
- *“I am able to sit down and work things out with my kids, instead of not even thinking about what I was doing. It taught me to view things better.”*



## How has the group helped you to become a better father?

- *“I’m definitely a better father and a better human. My kids are saying: Dad, these days, you are listening to us. You ask questions. In two hours, you make us talk a lot.”*
- *“I’ve learned about child-centered parenting. That was new and helpful.”*
- *“I am more attentive and considerate to both my wife’s and my kids’ needs and wants. I am more understanding when listening to their issues and concerns.”*



# Lessons Learned

- It's a population that needs help and can be helped!
- Slow to get the program off the ground – delayed starts
- Getting enough REFFERALS!
- Needed to redefine "partnership" (i.e., the challenges of getting men to the group is owned jointly by CAS and Aisling Discoveries.
- My focus needed to shift from *it's your problem* to *it's OUR problem...to be solved together and creatively (e.g., posters, staff meetings/training, providing outreach and consultation).*
- Takes a lot of TIME & ENERGY – but it's worth it!



## For more information contact:

Gordon Cone  
Manager of Community Intervention and Treatment Services  
Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre  
325 Milner Avenue  
Scarborough, ON M1B 5N1

: 416-321-5464, ext. 251

Email: [gcone@aislingdiscoveries.on.ca](mailto:gcone@aislingdiscoveries.on.ca)