

## **HRA Employees Attend ‘Call to Men to End Domestic Violence’ Conference**

On May 21 and 22, 2009, ten male employees of HRA’s Office of Domestic Violence and Emergency Intervention Services (ODVEIS) attended the 4th annual Call to Men to End Domestic Violence conference at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. The conference focused on ways men can become part of the solution to domestic violence, both as allies to the women in their lives and as role models for young men and boys. For the men who attended from HRA, it was an eye-opening experience that brought home the importance of the work they do every day.

Many of the presenters described the way our society defines men as aggressive and controlling – a limited definition of masculinity the presenters called the ‘man box.’ “We talk about men in terms of power, authority, control,” said Greg Washington, an HRA contract manager who attended the conference. “We have to think differently as men,” added LMSW Thomas Davis. “The majority of abusers are men,” Mr. Washington said, “[but] this conference was interested in shifting the social view of men – in getting men involved as part of the solution.”

A large part of the conference focused on changing the attitudes of the next generation of young men – helping them realize that all women deserve the same respect they give their mothers and sisters. Also, they discussed the role men can have in raising strong and independent daughters. “Teach your daughters they’re not second class citizens,” said Mr. Washington.

The ten men who attended the conference from HRA left with a new conviction in the work they do. “It was very moving to see the amount of men participating in this conference,” said Dwayne Valentine, a systems director at HRA. “It was a wake up call.” Lungange Osongo, MSW, was inspired by the positive role men could play in HRA’s domestic violence program. “It’s good to have men working in [ODVEIS], to show victims that all men are not bad. It helps them to see there are also men who can help them.” Robert Houser, an office manager at HRA, was inspired personally as well as professionally. “As men and employees of HRA, we’re responsible for starting a change,” Mr. Houser said. “I have a newborn son – maybe I can instill some of these ideas in him.”