

# CUNY Fatherhood Academy Graduates its First Class of *First-Class Dads*

Although autumn means a new school year for most New Yorkers, it was graduation time for some very special dads. Twenty-two young men were the first graduating class of the City University of New York Fatherhood Academy, a free 16-week program which assists young fathers in employment, parenting skills and helps them achieve higher educational goals. On graduation day at the LaGuardia Community College campus in Long Island City, from top down to bottom up, there was a giddy sense of jubilation among the proud moms and some very vocal two-year-olds, all the way up to Mayor Bloomberg, who reeled off a series of off-the-cuff bits of advice to the dads.



“When you’re at a crossroads, you have to not give up.” *Mayor Bloomberg*



CUNY Academy dads with their kids and, at right, the City's Fatherhood Coordinator, Alan S. Farrell

“When you’re at a crossroads, you have to not give up,” said the mayor, who also advised the dads, “to be genuine. Kids want to know if your heart is in the right place.”

There was, indeed, a full house of genuine dads. Take, for instance, when there was a cry from one little tot in the audience; “I want daddy,” she said. And, sure enough, a young father dashed from the stage and settled his daughter down.

The standing ovations were too many to count, and the diploma ceremony was a near tear-jerker as David Speal, one of the Academy counselors, spoke of the students who had overcome hardships and persevered. So many of the men had to wrestle with the responsibilities of fatherhood, holding down jobs or pursuing work, and some had to fight the urge to drop the program. But they didn’t—and Speal was, no doubt, one reason why.

“I don’t need a script,” Speal said. “I’ve got a place in my heart for each of you.”

And school was really in session when graduating dad Cory Shaw took the mike and read a poem that he’d written to his two-year-old daughter, Nivaya. Shaw’s previous goal in life was to survive the week alive. He’s changed all that, as reflected in the lines of his poem, which included, “You little me / because of you, I’ll try to get a degree.”

Shaw is now working a good job at Macy’s and had enrolled in LaGuardia, majoring in Industrial Design. Like all of the dads in the Academy, he knows that this ending means a new beginning. Six of them have enrolled as freshman at LaGuardia, four have passed their G.E.D. exams, and thirteen have obtained permanent employment.

In the challenge laid down by Shawn Dove, from the Open Society Foundation which helps fund the Academy, they’re all going to have to “keep on, keepin’ on.”

---

For more information about the Academy, call 718-730-7336, email [dspeal@lagcc.cuny.edu](mailto:dspeal@lagcc.cuny.edu) or go to [http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/nycdads/downloads/pdf/cuny\\_fatherhood\\_flyer.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/nycdads/downloads/pdf/cuny_fatherhood_flyer.pdf).