



Department of Youth and Community Development

First Fatherhood Commencement Ceremony

On July 10th the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) held its first Fatherhood Commencement Ceremony at the chambers of the Brooklyn Borough President. This event supports DYCD's Fatherhood Initiative, which helps non-custodial fathers reconnect with their children and actively participate in their lives both emotionally and financially. The Ceremony recognized select dads from all of the community-based organizations (CBOs) that contract with DYCD to participate in its Fatherhood Initiative:

- Catholic Charities Neighborhood Services, Inc., *Man Up Fatherhood program*
- Claremont Neighborhood Centers, Inc., *FATHERS program*
- Forestdale, Inc., *Forestdale Fathering Initiative*
- The Fortune Society, *Fatherhood Initiative program*
- Friends of Island Academy, *Friends 2 Fathers program*
- Fund for the City of New York/Center for Court Innovation/ Midtown Community Court Dads United for Parenting (D-UP) program
- New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, *Positive Parenting Plus program*
- The Osborne Association, *Fatherhood program*
- Union Settlement Association, *Young Men on the Rise program*

A warm welcome was extended by Sandra Chapman, Deputy Brooklyn Borough President. DYCD Commissioner Jeanne B. Mullgrav thanked the event sponsors – Healthfirst and Career Gear – and acknowledged the dads for their various individual efforts: learning how children grow and develop; distinguishing discipline and punishment; considering the cost of raising a child and planning for his/her future including by paying child support; expressing oneself in a helpful way and teaching one's child to do the same; and working towards an effective co-parenting relationship with their child's mother or guardian.

A father from each program who made great strides over the past year received a new suit of clothes from Career Gear, in recognition of his efforts to wear at the Ceremony. Gary Field, founder of Career Gear, extended an invitation to all the dads to visit Career Gear and attend their professional development workshops. George Hulse, Vice President of External Affairs for Healthfirst, congratulated the men and reminded them of the importance to maintain proper health and see to the health of their children including by obtaining health insurance.

A keynote address was delivered by Shawn Dove, Open Society Foundation, Campaign for Black Male Achievement, who began by insisting the participants rise for a standing ovation in consideration of their accomplishments. Mr. Dove delivered a humorous and inspiring address, tasking the fathers to consider the achievements they've made over the past year and think about the greater contributions they have to offer to their children and their communities going forward. Dove expressed that "there is gold" inside the fathers just waiting to be mined; a sentiment very much in keeping with the strengths-based approach utilized by all of the CBOs participating in the Fatherhood Initiative.

Each attendee in turn rose to be greeted by Commissioner and the other speakers and receive a certificate of participation. Following the presentation of the certificates, William Bull (a graduate of Catholic Charities Man Up program) won the main raffle prize donated by Google: an ASUS tablet computer; Benigno Padilla (a graduate of Forestdale Inc's Fathering Initiative) was another lucky dad, winning a gift basket filled with Nick Jr. games, toys and DVDs that was contributed by an anonymous donor.