

What a great way to start. On July 31st, the NYC Housing Authority kicked off Mayor Bloomberg's Fatherhood Initiative with a grand reception at the bright and airy Williamsburg Community Center in Brooklyn. While tables of families listened on the sunlit gymnasium floor, representatives of the Fatherhood Initiative agency partners stepped up to the lectern to speak about the city's commitment to fathers.

In addition to plenty of talk about pooling resources and creating productive environments, several speakers got personal about their commitment to the cause because, after all, we each have had a father at at least one point in our lives—and some of us are fathers ourselves. While Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott spoke of recently reaching a deeper understanding with his daughter, NYCHA's Michelle Pinnock told of her upbringing by her dad, and reminded the audience that "as much as it's true that nothing replaces the love of a mother, it is also true that nothing replaces the love of a father."

In preparation for the day's events, Williamsburg Community Center children painted impressive portraits of their fathers, which were on display on the stage. Showing both great talent (and love), the Williamsburg kids did a wonderful job. Speaking of kids, while some of them were listening attentively, most took to the bouncy castle in the adjoining outdoor basketball court. If they weren't bouncing, they were popping pop corn into their mouths or on line for burgers and hot dogs.

One young tot, the daughter of 21-year dad Daquan, was fast asleep in her stroller. Her dad made it over to the event from the Sumner housing projects to check out the scene, because he is proud to be an active father (he also has a five-year-old son). Daquan was looking cool and collected as he pushed the stroller through the crowd. "The best thing about being a dad is her," he said, while looking down at his daughter. Daquan said he loves being there for his kids. He added that he was about to start a job training program so that he could help provide for his kids.

Way to go, Daquan.

For all the dads who want to step up and need job support or parenting advice, the Williamsburg center is just the first one of many that will be hosting free programming for fathers and their children in structured activities that foster parental bonding. NYCHA will be working with other agencies to develop and roll out programs in other NYCHA communities over the next year.