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Fathering Court Successfully Reunites Families

On January 27th, twelve fathers dressed in graduation robes walked down the aisle of the jurors lounge at the 2012 Fathering Court Graduation Ceremony. The Fathering Court is now in its fourth year. Over that time, the program has graduated more than 50 fathers, and each graduate has overcome the lowest of lows: they were all incarcerated, they were all separated from their children during that time, they all owed child support and they returned to no job and a lot of doors closed to them.

The Fathering Court enables fathers to support and connect with their families. The program was created in response to studies that found that one in four adults returning to the community in DC owed court-ordered child support. This program works to help fathers reconnect with their children, not just financially, but emotionally.

“I could not be happier for the commitment to responsible fatherhood made by the graduates,” Judge Milton Lee said of this year’s graduating class. Judge Lee presides over the Fathering Court program. “Their efforts will make a real contribution to the success of their children.” Judge Lee presented each graduate with his graduation certificate. Both Judge Lee and the graduates’ social worker told individual stories about each graduate, providing insight to the significant efforts each of the fathers made to overcome obstacles.

The Fathering Court program combines needs-assessment, skill development opportunities, case management, peer support, completion of a mandatory curriculum and putting non-custodial parents in contact with community resources -- with an emphasis on employment -- to give those returning from prison the ability to meet the needs of their children. Other Fathering Court services include housing assistance and referrals, substance abuse treatment and counseling, mediation services, referrals for legal assistance and any other assistance necessary. In four years and over 50 graduates, only two participants have been rearrested, an astounding success rate.

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