



## Department of Homeless Services Honors High School and College Graduates from Shelters

On Wednesday, June 29, the Department of Homeless Services' Future Leaders 2016 event honored students from DHS shelters who graduated high school and college. Over 100 high school graduates and their families, along with four college graduates from the Advantage Academy program, joined DHS, HRA, and Department of Education staff at New York Public Library's Celeste Bartos Forum for a night celebrating their accomplishments. As a reward for their accomplishments each grad at the event received a free laptop to help with their studies provided by the College Prep Project and the DHS Trust Fund.



*Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Herminia Palacio*

"Tonight is about celebrating one step toward a brighter future," said Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Herminia Palacio, who shared some of the hardships she faced to get to her current position with students. "People won't know the challenges you've overcome, but you'll carry those challenges with you and look at them as a source of strength and a reminder of how far you can go."



*DSS Commissioner Steven Banks interviewed at the event*

"First, I want to say to all the graduates and their families—you've achieved an incredible thing," said Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks. "As you go forward and keep adding credentials, remember that you're also helping to fight poverty and income inequality in this city and the nation."

Tasia Brown, who graduated from Brooklyn Collegiate this year and is a National Honors Society member, shared her experiences and her hopes for the future as she begins college in the fall.

"I'll always be grateful to my mother. Even though we're in the situation we're in, she always told me never to give up, and when an opportunity comes to you, you should take it," said Ms. Brown. "In the fall I'll be attending SUNY Cobleskill. I want to be a veterinarian. My campus has a working farm. I'm excited I'll be able to interact with all the animals and do research."

The students present at the event attended workshops on college applications and school visits through DHS' College Prep Project, and also participated in two DOE Students in Temporary Housing programs, the All Sisters Evolving Together (ASET) program for girls, and the Safe In My Brother's Arms (SIMBA) program for boys, which provide academic, social, and emotional support, tutoring, and more.

"ASET was like another family to me," said Ms. Brown. "We were all in the same situation, so no one was judged."

"We create a safe space for these young people where they don't have to hide the fact that they're temporarily displaced," said Wayne Harris, Students in Temporary Housing Content Expert. "There's no shame. They know they're only homeless, not hopeless."

Dashown Wilson, Jr., another graduate, received a full athletic scholarship to play quarterback for SUNY Alfred State, where he plans to study Criminal Justice.

"My journey to get here has not been easy. I was raised by a single father. He was my rock—I wouldn't be here without his help and support," said Mr. Wilson. "By deploying my skills on the field, I was able to avoid the pitfalls of the street. Even though I've been through some dark and tough times, I'll always believe in myself."



*High School Graduate Tasia Brown*



*High School Graduate Dashown Wilson, Jr.*

The Advantage Academy program helps homeless and formerly homeless individuals obtain an Associates' Degree in business administration from St. John's University at no cost. The program was established in 2009 as a partnership between DHS and St. Johns. Candice Jones shared how the program was able to help her complete her Associates in Business. She is going on to study Accounting at Baruch College in the fall.

"I'd like to thank the program for giving people like me the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty through education," said Ms. Jones. "There's a saying in life—it's not where you've been, it's where you're going—and I live by this."