



## **Drug Court Graduates Celebrate Sober Living**

**November 2012 Vol. 27 No. 3**

The bass of the dance music could be heard blocks away from Fort Lincoln Park in Northeast Washington, D.C. The cheering and the clapping were even louder. For more than 20 individuals, September 20 was a day to celebrate: their graduation from the D.C. Superior Court's drug intervention program New Directions.

For the graduates, the day represented their hard work over the last six months (on average) that included intensive treatment and regular meetings with case managers and judges to review their progress. It represented at least 90 days of clean living and a strong bond formed with other participants in their struggle to overcome drug and alcohol addiction. As the title of the program reflects, the day represented a new direction in their lives.



"Congratulations to those who are graduating," D.C. Mayor Vincent Gray said. "And to those who are early in the journey, I hope you look to those graduates as an inspiration."

Individuals who participate in the New Directions program go through four phases of recovery. In each of the phases, participants must attend group sessions for a certain number of hours each week and must not incur any drug infractions. As they progress through each phase, the number of hours decreases. In phase four, participants must attend one outside self-help group. If they meet all the conditions, each phase should last six weeks, for a total of 24 weeks in the program before they graduate. Those who moved from one phase to next were also recognized at the graduation ceremony.

In addition to Mayor Gray, Imani Walker, cofounder and executive director of the Rebecca Project for Human Rights, and Judges Frederick H. Weisberg and Ann O. Keary of the D.C. Superior Court were on hand for the graduation ceremony, praising the strength of the participants and offering words of encouragement.

"Courage is not about the absence of fear. It's acting responsibly in the face of that fear," said Walker, who was once an addict until she turned her life around and founded the

Rebecca Project. The group connects women in poverty, who are often single mothers in recovery and/or in prison, to community-based resources.

"You're reclaiming your lives," Judge Keary told the participants. A loud "YES!" from one of the graduates rang through the air.

According to the Pretrial Services Agency for the District of Columbia, 88 percent of New Directions participants experience a reduction in substance abuse, and only 6 percent are rearrested while in the program.

New Directions is run through the D.C. Superior Court's Drug Court, a special court calendar that aims to reduce recidivism among nonviolent substance-abusing defendants by offering resources to help them tackle their addictions.—*T.L.*