



RICHMOND CITY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF
RICHMOND CITY JUSTICE CENTER
1701 FAIRFIELD WAY
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23223
C.T. WOODY, JR., SHERIFF

PRESS RELEASE

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Media Contact: Dr. Sarah Scarbrough
Office: (804) 646-0987, Cell: (804) 837-7779

ANNUAL DANCE OF THEIR OWN CELEBRATION WITH MALE INMATES AND THEIR DAUGHTERS

Once again, fathers crowned their daughters with princess tiaras and pinned corsages on their dresses at the Richmond City Justice Center's *A Dance of Their Own*. A Dance of Their Own, co-sponsored by Camp Diva and Girls for a Change, offered the opportunity for a dozen male inmates to share the afternoon with their daughters. Peppered with dancing, games, a photo booth, cake, and journal writing, the event provided an opportunity for the men and girls to begin to reconnect and build positive relationships.

One participant, Aziz, wrote in his journal, "The first day of the new beginning with my daughter, one of the happiest and hardest days of my life. I was more than happy to see my daughter. What we shared was a bond and experience we both will always remember. I'll always remember what time and happiness I took from her by being away. She noticed the change in me, mostly physical and from worrying – my hair has turned gray. The last time she saw me up close was March 31, 2014. This was a great learning experience. Our next dance will be out in society."

Most all of the men involved are participants of RCJC's REAL Program and were selected through a voluntary application process. One applicant wrote, "I believe I should be selected because I have strived and continue to work towards change with my behavior, my thoughts, my way of living, my responsibilities, and myself as a person and becoming a productive member of society. I've worked very hard and it's been a long time since my wife and daughter told me they were proud of me. I feel very good about myself and my recovery and would like to finally experience what it feels like to spend time with my daughter drug free."

Each of the men were required to go through 16 fatherhood classes led by Clarence Harris of the Richmond Family and Fatherhood Initiative (RFFI). The classes were sponsored by RFFI through the Virginia Department of Health and the Trinity Family Life Center. Although many of the fathers thought they were "good dads," the classes helped them realize that there is more to fatherhood than gift giving or the occasional visit. They discussed the importance of co-parenting and the relationship between the mother and father. One of the largest eye openers to many of the men was being told their daughters would look to marry someone like them one day. This really hit home to

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many and made them realize change was essential. In addition, they participated in an etiquette class hosted by the Virginia Governor's Mansion butlers Martin "Tutti" Townes and Dwan Anthony, where they learned everything from table manners, setting a table, escorting someone down the aisle, and tying a tie.

Sheriff C.T. Woody, Jr. shared, "A father's relationship in his daughter's life is critical. Children from fatherless homes are much more prone to teen pregnancy, lower educational levels, criminality and drug use. In fact, children whose fathers are incarcerated are eight to nine times more likely to be incarcerated than a child whose father is not. We believe in helping reconnect these families so the generational cycles we continually see in Richmond will cease."

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