

Diversity Center graduation



Graduate Rona Young, *center* is flanked by her mother, Carol Young and her daughter Freddie Young. Freddie also is a Clark graduate and employee.

Graduates were celebrated at the Diversity Center graduation on June 7.

Clark College President Dr. Karin Edwards challenged the graduates: "Don't minimize your accomplishment. Be proud of it. Don't ever forget where you came from. Be your true authentic self. Every day of my life, I remind myself I'm from the Boogie Down Bronx."

Three graduates participated:

- Matty Quinn, Associate in Fine Arts (Fine Arts: Studio Arts AFA)
- Rona Young, Bachelor of Applied Science in Human Services
- Tracy Taylor, Associate in Applied Science in Supervisory Management

Alum Dee Harris, Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion executive assistant, shared her story of living in a homeless shelter and being unsure of her future when a Clark College employee from Workforce Education Services spoke at the shelter about opportunities at Clark. Soon after, she enrolled at Clark and became a paralegal. Later she earned a bachelor's degree. She has worked at the college for more than a decade. She has raised seven children.

Dee said, "I never felt I didn't have an opportunity at Clark College. This degree is yours. This is what you have accomplished. No one can take that from you."



Left to right: Matty Quinn, Tracy Taylor, Intirm Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Vanessa Neal and Rona Young.

In the keynote address, graduating student Matty Quinn shared their story of growing up in a low-income household that was unsafe and toxic. They first enrolled at age 18 but dropped out because “my life was a mess.”

Later, when they decided to return to college, their mother was critical and unsupportive. Matty got help in therapy and returned to Clark.

Matty said, “The past couple of years have been one of the biggest journeys of my life. I no longer have connections with people who bring me down. I’ve made my own family here.”

Matty also took on leadership roles as a Student Ambassador and a peer mentor.

“I was finally proud of myself,” they said.

Next, Matty will be starting an internship as a paraeducator to help the future generation of kids and artists.

Interim Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Vanessa Neal, closed with this inspiration: “Change is a constant part of life. You’ll face challenges and adversity. You’ll meet people who don’t understand you. Embrace your curiosity. Follow your opportunities. Lean into your courage over fear. Honor your truest self. Remember what matters and keep going.

Photos: Clark College/Susan Parrish