

Press Release

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Contact: Kat Chapman

Work: [617-635-5030](tel:617-635-5030) Cell: [757-403-4158](tel:757-403-4158) Email: kat.chapman@smartfromthestartboston.org



Boston-Based Smart from the Start's Family Leadership Team Recognized for Efforts in Lowering Early Ed Achievement Gap

City Councilors Arroyo and Jackson, BCYF Director of Operations, Diane Joyce Join in "Leaders in Action" Celebratory Dinner

Boston- 21 caregivers that comprise Smart from the Start's (Smart) 2013 [Family Leadership Team](#) were recognized for their role in helping to prevent the achievement gap and provide support and advocacy among young children in their Boston-area communities at a celebratory dinner on December 19. [Smart from the Start](#) works in the neighborhoods Charlestown, Dorchester, Mattapan, Jamaica Plain, Roslindale, Roxbury and the South End striving to break cycles of chronic school underachievement and generational poverty.

[Smart from the Start](#) has successfully reached close to 1,000 children across 16 program sites, up from 670 children in 6 program sites last year, and the Family Leadership team continues to enhance program effectiveness through community outreach and empowerment.

The "**Leaders in Action**" **Celebratory Dinner** began with presentation from the Founding Executive Director, Cherie Craft, and 2011-2012 Family Leader of the Year, Jolene Hernandez. Together the leaders presented Outstanding Commitment and Service Awards to **City Councilor Tito Jackson (D7), City Councilor At-Large Felix G. Arroyo and BCYF Director of Operations, Diane Joyce**. "I am proud to have worked with and continue to work with Smart from the Start. Early education is the key to success and they have remained committed to helping all children succeed," said City Councilor At-Large Felix G. Arroyo. Volunteers, Cecily O'Conner and Faith Cassetana, were also recognized by Smart for their exceptional commitment and participation with the organization.

After accepting the award, **City Councilor Tito Jackson** made a surprise announcement that Smart was chosen to be the recipient of an \$850 donation from the **Boston Maccabi Rugby Team**. "Smart from the Start's commitment and success in supporting children and their families has been outstanding," said Councilor Jackson. "The accessibility it provides for families and the partnerships it forms with Boston's schools make the organization particularly invaluable. I am humbled to be honored next to the family members and leaders who's daily efforts make them the true fabric of their communities."

To introduce the 2013 Family Leadership Team, Smart from the Start showcased a [video](#) that highlighted team's experience before calling each person to accept an award and share their stories of transformation after enrolling in Smart programs. Then each of Smart's seven neighborhoods awarded one leader from the team who has shown exceptional leadership throughout their enrollment in Smart programming.

Cherie Craft described the team as, "a cohort of parents and caregivers with amazing strengths and resiliencies who have demonstrated outstanding personal achievement, participation in the program, and leadership in their communities, despite personal struggles and challenges."

The evening will concluded with announcing Smart's 2012-2013 Family Leader of the Year, Anthony Rainey. Each year, the Family Leaders and staff choose a Family Leader of the Year. This person represents the program and serves as a role model for other parents. Anthony is a Smart from the Start participant exemplifies the mission of the program and spreads the word to other families in the community. He is a father of two twin boys and facilitates the Focusing on Fatherhood programs.

"The steps that bought me here today, not having a father and looking for that guidance, brought me to become a Family Leader because I want better for the future" says Anthony. "Now that I have the strength, the wisdom and the knowledge to step up and be a leader I can help others no matter their age, race, or gender. [To be a leader] you have to be all around loving and embrace everyone and I have the drive to do that."