

## GATEWAY TO COLLEGE WELLNESS PROGRAM TRANSFORMS LIVES



February 2015

By noon on Friday, December 12, the new Multiple Use Building at San Francisco City College was undergoing a transformation. Round tables in the back of the large rectangular room were decked with bright tablecloths, fresh flowers in vases served as centerpieces, and volunteers set up rows of yellow chairs facing the podium in the front of the room. Mylar balloons shaped like stars with rainbow lettering – “Congratulations!” – bobbed gently overhead in each corner.

At 12:30pm, 12 Gateway to College students in caps and gowns filed into the festive room, as friends, family members, and loved ones looked on and cheered. “All of these kids are amazing,” said Vanessa Marrero, MSW, Wellness Coordinator at Gateway to College. “They’ve transformed their lives.”

Gateway to College, a program based at City College of San Francisco, serves students between the ages of 16 and 21 who have either dropped out of high school or may not graduate. Students take courses to earn credit toward both their high school diploma and a college degree or certificate. Most Gateway students achieve their high school diploma in two to three years, but they often earn up to 40 college units while enrolled in the program.

The program provides resources and support every step of the way, including academic advising, career training, and life-skills training. Ms. Marrero teaches an introductory Life Skills Class and focuses on wellness, health education and empowerment, and life skills development. The Wellness Center offers students opportunities for team building, peer leadership, empowerment, attitudinal healing groups, and more.

According to one recent graduate, “Wellness helped me manage many of my personal goals and issues that can influence my academic performance. I have been able to be much more proactive about my career as a student since I know what kinds of personal and emotional obstacles can hold me back. I was able to be more open about my struggles with anxiety and come up with ways and plans to not let it come in the way of my academic success.”

After the students received their diplomas, Ms. Marrero took the podium to recognize outstanding Wellness participants and present awards.

Jasmine Nisha and Sabin Hertz received *Certificate of Excellence* awards for “demonstrating impeccable wellness self-care skills, effective health education empowerment, and remarkable service.”

Jordan Covington and Ricky Guerrero received *Rising Star* awards for “leadership and dedication to their Healthy Eating Service Learning Project.”

Kalle Burton and Aisjah Forte received *Certificate of Leadership* awards for “service, commitment, and dedication to the mission and practice of Wellness.” They were both [Youth Outreach Workers](#), a Wellness peer-outreach program.

Congratulations to the Gateway to College Class of 2014!