



NEWS FROM:
Office of Public Defender
Matt Shirk, Fourth Circuit
www.MattShirkPublicDefender.com

Contact: Matt Bisbee
Public Information Officer
Tel: (904)630-7350
MPB@PD4.COJ.net

For Immediate Release

September 27, 2010

PDO Juvenile Mentor Graduates from Faith-Based Transitional Program



Jacksonville, FL: Sylvester Black (pictured) serves part-time in the Law Offices of Public Defender Matt Shirk where he works with select juvenile clients who are in need of a caring, supportive adult to spend time with them in court proceedings and attorney meetings, but also outside of those confines. Mr. Black visits the young people in their homes, throws the football with them in the park, treats them to a soda at the corner store and goes to their school when asked. His dedication comes from a sincere desire to dissuade the young men who have already entered the criminal justice system from making poor choices that will keep them returning to that system as had happened to him. Mr. Black, now 52 years old, spent 27 years of his life behind bars on various convictions. Public Defender Matt Shirk knows that Mr. Black is committed to helping implement cost-effective prevention and intervention techniques which ideally saves taxpayer dollars and most importantly saves young lives.

On Friday (9/24), Mr. Black participated in a graduation ceremony at Jacksonville's City Rescue Mission marking his completion of the year-long LifeBuilders Recovery Program. Along with 25 classmates, the graduates' accomplishments were celebrated with various speeches, musical selections and sermons. The inspirational ceremony attracted hundreds of attendees and defined City Rescue Mission's ongoing commitment to serving area homeless people.

"Sylvester Black fills a very necessary void in lives of our young clients," said Shirk. "He provides them a level of compassion and understanding that they likely have never had. The life experience he's had and his determination to veer young people away such a path is commendable. We are extremely proud of him for his work and on his recent graduation."

Among the graduation speakers was Fourth Judicial Circuit Assistant Public Defender Rob Mason (pictured, right) who is the Director of the Juvenile Unit; Mr. Mason assists Mr. Black in determining which young clients are going to receive mentoring. The unique role Sylvester plays in the Public Defender Office and the local juvenile justice system was featured earlier this year in a [Florida Times-Union](#) cover story entitled '*In them, mentor sees himself...but he's desperate not to*' (March 1, 2010).

