

## Kids' University Aims to Inspire Dreams and Diplomas

Written by Kim Horner | July 24, 2017

Starting with the littlest graduates in red, dozens of children from ages 4 to 15 in colorful caps and gowns were able to experience their own university graduation.

In this case, it was Kids' University.

Now in its 22nd year, the weeklong educational camp hosted by The University of Texas at Dallas



Brooklyn, one of 323 children who participated in Kids' University at UT Dallas in June, got a high-five from graduation speaker Tory Grant.

Dr. George Fair, vice president of diversity and community engagement and dean of the School of Interdisciplinary Studies.

The festivities marked the end of the camp, but officials hope that for the students, the ceremony is just the beginning.

"Graduation is an important part of the Kids' University curriculum," said Fair, who leads UT Dallas' involvement in the camp. "We want children at Kids' University to experience the excitement of earning a degree and envision themselves graduating from a college or a university in the future."



After earning his diploma from Kids' University, Stephan, 4, shook hands with Dr. George Fair, UT Dallas vice president for diversity and community engagement and dean of the School of Interdisciplinary Studies. Stephan said he liked computer class, going outside to play and eating pizza at the camp.

and the Dallas nonprofit Rainbow Days aims to expose children experiencing homelessness to a college campus. This summer, the program drew 323 children from local emergency and transitional housing programs and domestic violence shelters.

Family and friends clapped and cheered for the graduates as they walked across the front of a classroom to get their diplomas. Graduates received high-fives from commencement speaker Tory Grant and handshakes from



Rachel received congratulations at the Kids' University graduation ceremony from Dr. George Fair.

## Kids' University Aims to Inspire Dreams and Diplomas (cont.)

Kids' University features a variety of activities and classes including robotics, science, art, bullying prevention, team building, a visit by therapy dogs and a magic show. Partner organizations provide classes, including a session about bugs by the Perot Museum of Nature and Science.



Emily volunteered to help with the linking rings during a magic show by Helen and Joe Drakeley of Drakeley Magic. The Drakeleys said a donor provided support that made the show possible.

Eight-year-old participant Brooklyn said that graduation was one of her favorite parts of Kids' University.

"I also liked the team-building," she said after receiving her diploma.

Kelly Wierzbinski, director of Rainbow Days' Family Connection program, said the ultimate goal of Kids' University is to help homeless youths learn about potential career opportunities, how to set and attain goals and understand the value of education.

"We want the children to believe in their futures and that they do have a purpose in life," Wierzbinski said. "It isn't on accident that we have the camp on a college campus full of students. They begin to realize more opportunities exist for them beyond what they see in their immediate lives."

At the graduation ceremony, Wierzbinski encouraged the students to consider returning to UT Dallas as college students.

"Dr. Fair believes in you and invites all of you to come back here to school someday," Wierzbinski told students at the ceremony.

After earning her diploma from Kids' University, De'Laysha, 11, said she already is thinking about future graduations.

"I want to come here when I go to college," De'Laysha said. "I'm going to study science."



Hunter, 10, with Hattie from Heart of Texas Therapy Dogs, at Kids' University.

<https://www.utdallas.edu/news/2017/7/24-32633-Kids-University-Aims-to-Inspire-Dreams-and-Diploma-story-wide.html>