

## Caring for Young People

Richard R. Buery Jr. is the first Black chief of the Children's Aid Society

**F**or the past decade, Richard R. Buery Jr. has been the mastermind behind several innovative initiatives designed to improve the lives of economically disadvantaged youth in New York City. But in October, Buery, 38, became the first African American and the youngest person to be named chief executive of the Children's Aid Society, a private charitable group that provides comprehensive services to 150,000 children and their families in New York City.

"I didn't think that a 30-something-year-old Black guy from Brooklyn who ran smaller agencies was the most obvious candidate," said Buery, a married father of two. "But I eventually realized that they were open to new types of leadership."

In many ways, Buery's life has prepared him for this moment. Born in the East New York section of Brooklyn, his parents provided stability in a neighborhood known for crime and poverty. It wasn't until Buery attended Stuyvesant High School — a specialized math and science public school in Manhattan — that he became acutely aware of the widespread disparity in educational opportunities.

"I realized that we have two New Yorks," he said. "There are places like East New York and then there are other neighborhoods with more resources and different expectations."

It's a lesson that left an indelible impression on Buery. After his sophomore year at Harvard, Buery partnered with college classmates to create a summer program for children in a Boston housing project. He worked for nearly a year as a public-interest attorney in New York after graduating from Yale Law School, but it wasn't long before he found himself reevaluating his priorities and began pursuing work in youth advocacy. Buery helped co-found iMentor, an e-mail-based mentoring service,

and was founding director of Groundwork Inc., an East New York-based social service provider.

Greg Johnson, executive director of the Sports Philanthropy Project — a Cambridge, Mass.-based community health advocacy program — believes that Buery is up to the task.

"The Children's Aid Society could not have made a better selection," said Johnson, a former assistant academic dean at Harvard's Adams House. "Richard is a bright, diligent and passionate human being. He's perfectly positioned to do good work for the organization for the next 30 years."

Yet Buery's new job is not without its challenges. Though the Children's Aid Society has an annual budget of more than \$100 million, the nation is in the midst of an economic



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downturn and charitable groups are struggling. Still, Buery hasn't lost sight of what he contends is the ultimate objective.

"If you really care about young people and want to impact young people systematically, then you have to build an integrated network of support so that families can help them to succeed from the cradle to the time they go to college," he said. "It's about bringing resources to communities to meet the needs of children and families where they are."

— Curtis Stephen