



Rocky Mountain Early Childhood Conference

April 15-16, 2011 • Colorado Convention Center • Denver, CO

Friday Luncheon Keynote Speaker

Geoffrey Canada

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In his 20-plus years with Harlem Children's Zone, Inc., Geoffrey Canada has become nationally recognized for his pioneering work helping children and families in Harlem and as a passionate advocate for education reform.

Joining the organization in 1983, Mr. Canada became the President and Chief Executive Officer of Harlem Children's Zone in 1990. The *New York Times Magazine* called the agency's work, "one of the most ambitious social experiments of our time." In October 2005, Mr. Canada was named one of "America's Best Leaders" by *U.S. News and World Report*.

In 1997, the agency launched the Harlem Children's Zone Project, which targets a specific geographic area in Central Harlem with a comprehensive range of services. The Zone Project today covers 100 blocks and aims to serve over 10,000 children.

The *New York Times Magazine* said the Zone Project "combines educational, social and medical services. It starts at birth and follows children to college. It meshes those services into an interlocking web, and then it drops that web over an entire neighborhood....The objective is to create a safety net woven so tightly that children in the neighborhood just can't slip through."

The work of Mr. Canada and HCZ has become a national model and has been the subject of many profiles in the media. Their work has been featured on "60 Minutes," "The Oprah Winfrey Show," "The Today Show," "Black in America 2," "This American Life," "Good Morning America," "Nightline," "The Charlie Rose Show," as well in articles in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Daily News*, *USA Today* and *Newsday*.

Mr. Canada grew up in the South Bronx in a poor, sometimes-violent neighborhood. Despite his troubled surroundings, Mr. Canada was able to succeed academically, receiving a bachelor of arts degree from Bowdoin College and a master's degree in education from the Harvard School of Education. After graduating from Harvard, Mr. Canada decided to work to help children who, like himself, were disadvantaged by their lives in poor, embattled neighborhoods.

Drawing upon his own childhood experiences and at the Harlem Children's Zone, Mr. Canada has written two books: "Fist Stick Knife Gun: A Personal History of Violence in America," published in 1995 by Beacon Press, and "Reaching Up for Manhood: Transforming the Lives of Boys in America," published in 1998 by Beacon Press. In its review of "Fist Stick Knife Gun," Publishers Weekly, "a more powerful depiction of the tragic life of urban children and a more compelling plea to end 'America's war against itself' cannot be imagined."

For his years of work advocating for children and families in some of America's most devastated communities, Mr. Canada was a recipient of the first Heinz Award in 1994. In 2004, he was given the Harold W. McGraw Jr. Prize in Education and Child Magazine's Children's Champion Award. In 2009, he received the Independent Sector's John W. Gardner Leadership Award.

He has also received the Heroes of the Year Award from the Robin Hood Foundation, The Jefferson Award for Public Service, the Spirit of the City Award from the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the Brennan Legacy Award from New York University and the Common Good Award from Bowdoin College. He has received honorary degrees from Harvard University, Bowdoin College, Williams College, John Jay College, Bank Street College and Meadville Lombard Theological Seminary.

A third-degree black belt, Mr. Canada is also the founder (in 1983) of the Chang Moo Kwan Martial Arts School. Despite his busy schedule as head of HCZ, he continues to teach the principles of Tae Kwon Do to community youth along with anti-violence and conflict-resolution techniques.

In 2006, Mr. Canada was selected by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg as co-chair of The Commission on Economic Opportunity, which was asked to formulate a plan to significantly reduce poverty. In 2007, he was appointed co-chair of New York State Governor's Children's Cabinet Advisory Board.

Mr. Canada is also the East Coast Regional Coordinator for the Black Community Crusade for Children. The Crusade is a nationwide effort to make saving black children the top priority in the black community. This initiative is coordinated by Marian Wright Edelman and the Children's Defense Fund.

Mr. Canada joined Harlem Children's Zone, Inc. (then called the Rheedlen Foundation) in 1983, as Education Director. Prior to that, he worked as Director of the Robert White School, a private day school for troubled inner-city youth in Boston.

The National Book Award-winning author Jonathan Kozol called Mr. Canada, "One of the few authentic heroes of New York and one of the best friends children have, or ever will have, in our nation."