

Hempstead programs help reduce crime, boost community

July 18, 2010 by JOIE TYRRELL / joie.tyrrell@newsday.com



It was the 10th day of "Camp Peace" at 100 Terrace Ave. in Hempstead, and the children there had spent the day swimming at a nearby pool and making beaded bracelets in the afternoon.

Inside the 5,000-square-foot space on the first floor of what was once considered one of the most notorious addresses in Nassau County, handmade paper butterflies dangled from the ceiling and the campers were reminded to bring socks for the next day because they were going bowling.

"This has been a blessing for the building," said resident Judith Cameron, whose grandson is in the program. "If this program wasn't here, I don't know where these kids would be."

Funded by the Nassau County district attorney's office, the new Camp Peace program at Terrace Avenue is part of an overall initiative launched more than two years ago to reduce crime in the area and revitalize the neighborhood that was once called the biggest open-air drug market in Nassau County. Hempstead police patrols have been increased and enforcement stepped up, and residents say the area of Terrace Avenue and Bedell Street has shown improvement.

"I believe that any effective law enforcement strategy has got to involve the community," Nassau District Attorney Kathleen Rice said last week. "The kids are so happy . . . and you see them smile and you say this is what life is all about."



Using forfeiture money, the district attorney's office provided \$40,000 in funding for the program that operates in a space used during the school year for an after-school program run by We Care For Children Inc. The space is donated by D&F Development Group, which owns and manages 100 Terrace Avenue Apartments. About 50 school-age children, ages 6 and up, attend the program and 17 were placed on a waiting list. Many of the children live in the Terrace Avenue building or in the neighborhood, and the camp is free.

"We worked together with the tenants' association in the building . . . to put together a summer camp program," said Peter Florey, one of the building's owners. "It is going to make a tremendous difference because they are out of school and don't have activities during the

summer."

Inez Dingle, president of the tenants' association and one of the board members of We Care For Children, Inc., which runs the program, said there had been a summer program about five years ago when the building was under different ownership. She wanted to resurrect a summer program for local children.

"As you know and most people know, this is one of the most underprivileged areas in Nassau County. Our goal is to try to grab a hold of our youth and help them strive for better before the streets get them," she said.

On Thursday, she learned from Florey that the building's owners were going to provide extra money so children on the waiting list could attend the camp. Throughout the summer, the children will go on field trips to a nearby pool, skating rink, bowling alley, water park and attend several Hempstead Police Department-provided workshops.

Dingle said the camp offers an educational aspect as well. On a recent afternoon, the children wrote in journals about what they wanted to be when they grew up. The camp runs from 9 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. each weekday until Aug. 28 and staffers include certified teachers.

"We initiated a major crime reduction in that building and six-block area two and a half years ago, and we have had enormous success reducing crime and there is a movement to turn this neighborhood around," Rice said. "And this summer program is another extension of that."

Camper Terrence McLean, 8, who is going into the fourth grade, said going to the pool is his favorite activity so far. If it weren't for Camp Peace, "I would be sitting home, doing nothing."

"We go on the trips. We are going to the skating rink and the pool - those are the best," said Lyric Adiansingh, 10.

Parent Gina Grafton said the lessons are not all fun and games: "Camp Peace is basically teaching them you don't have to do what you see other people do, but do what you learn to do."

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