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Voices against violence

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‘I thought the crowd was beautiful. It showed young people can co-exist with each other.’

PEACEFUL MESSAGE: Michelle “Fatu” Stewart, 16, above center, joins Liddy O’Neill, 26, during Youth in Action’s “Citywide Jump-off” battle of the rappers at AS220 in Providence yesterday. During the nonviolence support event, sisters Michelle Stewart, below left, and Henrietta Stewart, 18, enjoy the rap show.

Voices against violence

Youth group holds hip-hop peace event

BY KAREN A. DAVIS

PROVIDENCE — To passerby, the youthful crowd spilling onto Empire Street from the AS220 entrance yesterday may have looked jovial and carefree. But the crowd of mostly teens, sporting hip-hop styles and espousing hip-hop lyrics, came together for a serious purpose.

“Promote peace and stop the violence,” said Terri-Lyn Mangum, 17, a member of Youth in Action, the teen-run organization that sponsored the event.

The two-hour confab — dubbed the Citywide Jump-off — featured teams of freestyle rappers, who pleased the crowd by facing off in impromptu battles. Organizers observed a moment of silence for those who have lost their lives to gun violence. They also staged a break-dance performance and anti-violence poetry readings, and held a speak-out session, allowing audience members a chance to offer their solutions.

Mangum said Youth in Action decided to sponsor the event to bring teens from all parts of the city together to recognize that too many youths have died as a result of street violence and the friction between young men who live in different parts of the city.

Too many youths have suffered the same fate as George “Perm” Baxter, who was killed in the summer of 1999, after taking a bullet that wasn’t meant for him, Mangum said. Too
Hip

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many others have ended up like Alexandria "Momo" Ricard, who was dead in a hospital bed -- without the means for a proper funeral -- new rest in a numberless grave, with no headstone.

Working together, Munger said, members of the group believe that youth can help initiate the solutions that will prevent more people from dying this year.

Munger and Stephanie Alexander, 17, said their group's "hip-hop is a way of reaching out to young people because it has grown to be a culture...[and] is the one thing all urban youth relate to."

Yesterday's crowd appeared to be enthusiastic, relating to the message:

"We're not going to solve the youth violence problem if we do not have youth involved," said Munger.

The event was also a promotion of the youth group's Hip Hop 220, which came to the city last summer to work with teenagers.

"We're not going to solve the youth violence problem if we do not have youth involved," said Munger.

The event was organized by the Youth in Action, a group that has worked to use hip-hop as the vehicle for social change. Because, Munger noted, hip-hop has become "the universal language."

"We're not going to solve the youth violence problem if we do not have youth involved," said Munger.