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Voices against violence

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SERVING PROVIDENCE AND EAST PROVIDENCE

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



JOURNAL PHOTOS / CONNIE GROSCH

PEACEFUL MESSAGE: Michelle "Fatu" Stewart, 16, above center, joins Liddy O'Neil, 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
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — To passersby, 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.

"To 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



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many others have ended up like Alejandro "Honda" Brown, who was shot to death last May and — without the money for a proper funeral — now rests in a numbered grave, with no headstone.

Working together, Mangum said, members of her group believe that young people can help initiate the solutions that will prevent more people from dying this summer.

Mangum and Stephanie Alexander, 17, said their group "chose hip-hop as 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 have no problems relating to the message.

A standing-room-only crowd packed AS220's 140-person capacity performance studio, which pulsated with hip-hop beats and the positive mood of attendees. The crowd whooped and applauded its appreciation for the most creative put-down lines delivered in the battle of the rappers. Male and female opponents shook hands after the battles ended.

During the speak-out session, one teen said the city should provide safe places for youths to hang out and that legislators should pass gun-control bills to

cut off the endless flow of illegal weapons.

Deejay Rukiz urged the teens to appreciate and respect attempts by promoters to bring them entertainment and parties by not allowing fights to break out.

One teen urged her colleagues to get involved in community activism in order to have a say in policies and issues that involve them.

And, organizers urged the audience to get involved with positive activities that do exist — such as the free hip-hop, dance and poetry held from 3 to 6 p.m. on Wednesdays at Youth in Action. The youth group is located in the basement of Trinity United Methodist Church, at the corner of Broad Street and Elmwood Avenue.

In addition, Hip Hop 220 (an affiliate of AS220) offers an open mike day from 3 to 5 p.m. on Thursdays at AS220's Broad Street

studio.

"I thought the crowd was beautiful," said Elvis "E-Class" Manrique, 18, one of the organizers. "It showed young people can co-exist with each other."

Bethany "Carmen Jones" Champlin, 23, of Hip Hop 220, said the size of the crowd "shows that youth do want a solution . . . and that they do care."

Manrique and Champlin said they believe teens do not get involved with adult-led discussion about violence because they believe that adults do not listen to them or take them seriously.

'We're not going to solve [the youth violence problem] if we do not have youths involved.'

Karen Feldman, adult adviser



JOURNAL PHOTOS / CONNIE GROSSCH

FEELING THE MUSIC: Edlyne Ciceron, 14, gets into the rap beat during the musical portion of the Youth in Action's "Citywide Jump-off" nonviolence gathering at AS220 in Providence yesterday. Jerome McIntyre, 18, right, also turned out for the event.

"We're not going to solve [the youth violence problem] if we do not have youths involved," said Karen Feldman, the adult adviser who cofounded Youth in Action with four teens several years ago. "If they are the ones who are

most likely to be the victims and the perpetrators, they are the ones who have to initiate change . . . with help from adults and the community."

Yesterday's event was cosponsored by the Annie E. Casey

Foundation, Neighborhood Health Plan and AS220.

Feldman said it is only the first in a series of unifying events that Youth in Action plans to sponsor to help reduce youth violence.

She said the group has

resolved to use hip-hop as the vehicle for social change. Because, Manrique noted, hip-hop has become the "universal language."

For more information about Youth in Action, call 751-4264.