

City's 'family days' deter bad activity, promote peace

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As children danced in time with the thumping bass of music blaring in the center of Washington Village, and the drifting smell of cooked hamburgers hung in the air, Ella Dunlap, president of the Washington Village Residents Council, made sure everything was running smoothly during the 12th annual "Family Day" celebration at the housing development last Friday. Similar events took place at Meadow Gardens and Roodener Court housing complexes.

"It's a cookout for kids before they go back to school," Dunlap said, as she watched with a smile as a line of youngsters zoomed down the playground slide. "And it's a community day for everyone. The importance

of it is the whole community gets together as one."

Organized by the Community Prevention Task Force, a program of the Human Services Council, in conjunction with the Washington Village Tenant Association and the Norwalk Housing Authority, the celebration began in 1996 and has been a long-standing tradition in the city of Norwalk. In addition to music and food, the event featured a health resource fair, the Norwalk Fire Safety House, balloon sculpting, face painting, arts and crafts. The goal of the afternoon was to foster the types of positive relationships that support diversity and draw attention to neighborhood concerns, such as education, substance abuse,

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Autumn Driscoll / Staff photographer
Ten-year-old Elizabeth Diaz competes in the hoola-hoop contest last Friday during Washington Village Housing Development's Family Day 2010.

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and youth violence, Dunlap said.

"It's a day of peace," she said.

"Events like this that bring people in the community together can help deter the bad activity."

Norwalk Economic Opportunity Now, Calvary Baptist Church, the Norwalk Children's

Foundation, Christian Community Action and the Coalition of Norwalk Neighborhood Associations contributed to the event.

Norwalk resident and former mayoral candidate Steve Serasis said he would like to see more initiatives for kids come to Ryan Park - the patch of space abutting Wash-

ington Village that has for long served as a playground for local youth, but has also had its fair share of proposed programs and developments fall by the wayside. The park has historically seen a concentration of criminal activity, causing grief for local leaders and residents who want to reinforce it as a loca-

tion for childrens' sports and games.

"I believe the future of Norwalk is the kids," Serasis said.

"Everybody in the city is intertwined. It's important for the kids to know that they are part of a community that cares."

Lisa Cooper, director of the Mid-Fairfield Substance Abuse Coalition, a

component of the Human Services Council, said more initiatives, particularly for youths, must be ingrained in communities like Washington Village.

She said Dunlap has already helmed a "Dare2Be-Different" program targeting middle schoolers and high schoolers to "...motivate the kids, talk

to them, and bring in speakers" to address the important issues young people face every day.

"That's the goal," Cooper said.

"To bring in more programs that address issues like teen pregnancy and substance abuse and advocate for good health."