

It takes two: Mentor, mentees celebrate the right choice

NORWALK

By **LAUREN MYLO**
Hour Staff Writer

A choice has made all the difference.

The annual mentor-mentee celebration picnic was hosted Wednesday afternoon with approximately 90 mentors and their mentees, and one mentee said she's happy she was given the choice to include someone in her life.

Jazzmer Dyer, 10, said having a mentor is "a really fun opportunity," and she loves it.

"I think it's really fun that kids have a choice and have the opportunity to have a mentor like me," she said in between eating picnic food and having her face painted with two butterfly wings around her eyes.

But the mentors have also made a choice to be there for the young people.

Sandy Bria, Jazzmer's mentor, said she's been with the Jefferson Elementary School student since she was in second grade, and "it's been wonderful."

"I've watched her turn into a wonderful young woman," said Bria, who is also the mentor liaison and corporate citizenship leader for General Electric, where about 25 local employees are involved in



Hour photo / ERIK TRAUTMANN

Nathaniel Allen plays Connect Four with his mentor, Norwalk High School Guidance Chairman Dan Sullivan, at the Norwalk Mentor Program's annual end of the year reception Wednesday at Calf Pasture Beach. The mentors and mentees said their relationships together are successful because each made the choice to be with the other.

Mentors make a difference

From A3

the mentor program.

Two Board of Education members have also made the choice to connect with others through a mentor. Amy Jimenez and Greg Burnett attended Wednesday's picnic to celebrate the Norwalk Mentor Program as well as the relationship between the Human Services Council and the Norwalk Public Schools, who now jointly run the program.

Jimenez said she waited until her own children were grown to become a mentor for one young boy, and Burnett, the board's liaison to the HSC for the program, said he's planning to become a mentor next

year and already has a 92-year-old mentor of his own.

"There's something to be said of taking the words and wisdom of someone who's been down that path before and is willing to share with you," he said.

Burnett also noted he estimates the number of mentors waiting to be trained in September is now more than 60.

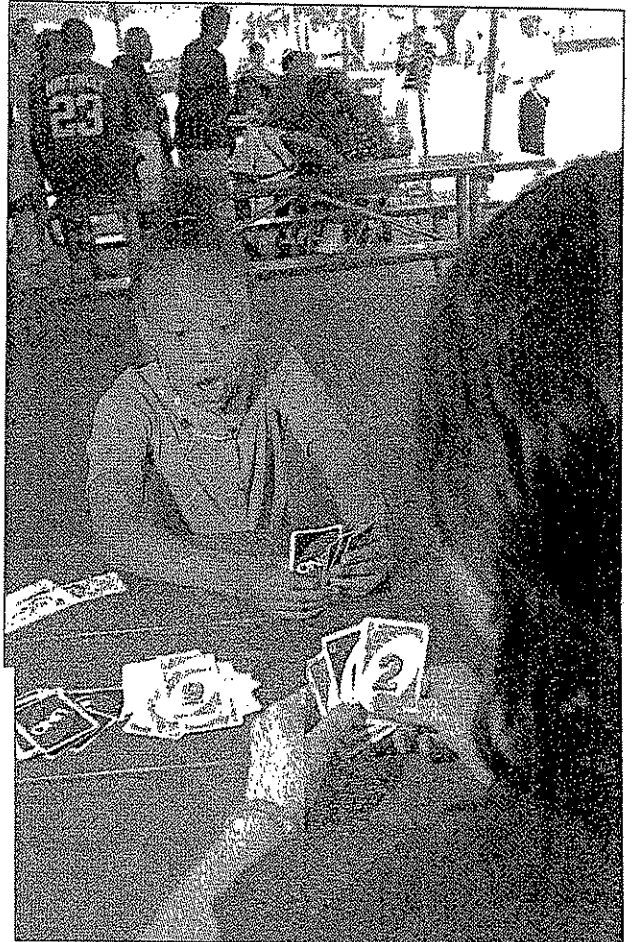
"Our goal is to grow the partnership and grow the program," he said. "And reach out to as many students as we can."

The New Canaan Nature Center did bird presentations, CT Face Art painted faces, Stew Leonard's donated the food and Walmart donated \$100 worth of

toys for the children. Students played wiffle ball and volleyball before the rain hit after lunch.

Burnett said his favorite part of the day was the conversations between mentors and mentees.

"You see them all sitting down and eating lunch together and back and forth going on," he said. "Not mentors saying, 'you need to do A, B and C' but they're exchanging."



Hour photo / ERIK TRAUTMANN

Morraine Brown plays Uno with her mentor Celia Campbell-Mohn at the Norwalk Mentor Program's annual end of the year reception Wednesday at Calf Pasture Beach.



Hour photo / ERIK TRAUTMANN

HAVING A BALL

Jayquan McCrae and Jimmie Johnson, mentees of the Norwalk Mentor Program, enjoy the end of the year celebration for the program on Wednesday.