

Dawnn Jaffier, 2004-2005 Allston/Brighton Representative is featured in this article from the Allston-Brighton TAB for her involvement at the West End House.



West End House reaches out to teens

By Casey Lyons/ Correspondent
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Monday and Wednesday nights, the beats pour from the West End House Boys and Girls Club in Allston. With the addition of a few new programs, teens in the city are finding more new places to hang out, socialize and try some very new things.

This year marks the first year of the teen evening program, said Jenny Nute, program director, but there has always been the need for a social outlet during the summer. While many would only associate the Boys and Girls Club with athletics, the teen evening program is stretching that definition in ways never thought possible before. Not only has the West End House added a darkroom and photography and culinary classes to its offerings, but on Monday nights, those teens in attendance are treated to music, mixing and recording instruction by the Union Hill Project, also in its pilot year. "We're helping kids realize their potential outside sports with music and photography classes. Those two things have never been offered here before, so we're giving kids new opportunities," said Nute.

While attendance varies at the evening program which runs from 6 to 9 on Monday and Wednesday, the teen center room is the hub of activity. With pool tables, television and a kitchen area, there is no lack of activities for teens to sample. On Mondays, the Union Hill Project converges on the computer room, supplying all the equipment needed to create music, a weekly guest artist and effectively opens the door to the music world for Boston teens.

Working in cooperation with the Boys and Girls Club, the project's goal is to introduce teens to music and by implication, computers. But instead of tuning up the violins and putting rosin on the bow, the Union Hill Project connects the turntables, mikes and sampling equipment instead; the project is a fresh take on both music lessons and computer education. A CD start to finish is a massive thing: someone has to write the song, someone has to sing it, yet another produces, then there's the cover art, packaging and the list goes on.

The common link throughout every step is the computer. Using the Internet and recording software, the Union Hill Project, made up of Kevin Scott, Zack Elgart and Tony Lamond, is bringing technology and computer proficiency to a demographic that has been falling behind. In an age where millions of computer jobs are going unfilled and outsourcing has become a household name, computer skills have never been more important, yet the Internet and computer skills have been missing teens from low-income families. To overcome the digital divide - the widening gap technology has made between the haves and the have-nots - the Union Hill Project incorporates computers into their sounds and music, and they do it in a way that the teens are responding to.

Last week, 30 kids attended a freestyle lesson with a local artist. Beyond that, teens are constantly shuffling in and out of the converted computer/recording room. With a citywide network of artists, the Union Hill Project is providing unique hands-on experience, mentors for aspiring artists and endowing teens with a general familiarity in computers.

"If a teen can produce a hip-hop track, then [he or she] can work an IT job," Scott said. Lamond added that the idea is to track teens' progress in the program, and by the end of high school, have those kids qualified for a good job in the IT or music industry or ready for college. Without budgets to be passed, and relying mainly on grants, faith and "the belief that people will donate," according to Leahy, the teen evening program is reaching out to and finding new and familiar faces in the crowd.

"It's good to have new opportunities," said Dawnn Jaffier, a junior at the John D. O'Bryant High School in Roxbury. Jaffier is also a member of the Keystone, a collaborative leadership program between Jackson Mann Community Center and the Commonwealth Tenants Association. In Keystone, Jaffier explained, teens age 14 to 18 are given pretty much free run of what events they plan, as long as there is enough interest and enough returned permission slips. Each year Keystone travels to a nationwide conference - previous years it has been held in Minnesota and Atlanta. This year's trip is planned to Orlando, but attendance and participation is required at Keystone meetings to be eligible for the field trip. Keystone also holds clothing and food drives to benefit those in the community. In a recent year, a bone marrow drive was held and through Keystone's efforts, a match was found for an ailing woman. "We make an effort to keep it interesting by offering new activities that keep kids coming," Jaffier said.

The West End House is at 105 Allston St. in Allston and membership fees are \$15 for the entire year. For more information, call the West End House Boys and Girls Club at 617-787-4044.