

One man – One youth

By Gloria Blakely

Youth today are in harm's way. Homicides in 2004 snatched away 5,000 young people ages 15-24 and suicides in that age group exceeded 4,000, this according to a nationwide CDC report. The figures represent the second and third leading causes of death among young Americans, the first being accidents.



(Photo: The Hope With Help youths with the Kixx Soccer Team Cheerleaders.)

When it comes to murder rates, Aaron Boyd believes there is always hope for change, and so he founded an organization here in Philadelphia where the number of murders in 2007 has topped this time last year. Boyd's nonprofit organization is called none other than There Is Hope With Help (www.thereishopewithhelp.org) [see the

advertisement in this issue].

The organization was founded two years ago on the principle that one mentor can make a difference in one child's life. Boyd says, "I've seen the benefit that a positive role model has on youth. There's a definite need for it, and I know I can make a difference." He just needs more volunteers to join the effort.

A cultural shift toward street justice and mores driven by drugs and booty calls may be underway, but only a few youth stand on the leading edge of this trend. All it takes nevertheless is a few hell-raisers to disrupt an entire neighborhood. Boyd's organization focuses on the at-risk few.

The program gives attention to young men, ages 13-17, teetering on disaster and connects them to the larger world of college and minor league sports, equity theater, and most importantly a positive support system.

A recent grant from the local United Way promises to elevate Boyd's support system. He has teamed with Concerned Black Men to recruit more adult males and thereby increase the one-on-one mentoring at-risk teens deserve. Iconic cultural events and maturity counseling should grow with added mentors and guest speakers.

When offering maturity counseling, improved decision-making, leadership skills, and self-worth as well as an improved sense of community count among the standard training goals.

Such desired outcomes are exemplified in one 14-year-old youth, who was referred to the program by the court. The young man had made school truancy a habit. Maturity training coupled with coaching on homework and test taking helped set him on a constructive life path.

Within a year he was discharged from truancy court. "He is a success story for us," declares Boyd.

Boyd reiterates this type of success is destined to grow with the gift of time from male role models. People can volunteer through the organization's web site or by calling 215.519.6253. There Is Hope With Help also welcomes monetary donations.