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Peace Rally intended to motivate, empower youth

CHRISTINE WON christine.won@journaltimes.com | Posted: Saturday, September 11, 2010 11:44 pm

RACINE - Latasha Fornizy, 23, is a victim of domestic abuse and a single mom living at the Women's Resource Center. She said she's usually shy, but a peace rally's cause Saturday gave her courage.

"I've been through violence since I was a child, and I wanted to be a voice for other victims," she said.

Fornizy sang "I Turn to You" by Christina Aguilera at Saturday's Stand Up and Promote Peace Rally remembering 9/11 victims at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center.

"There's a lot of people who inspire me and I wanted to show them that," Fornizy said.

Kenneth Lumpkin, president of the Racine Interfaith Coalition, said the rally was the culmination of a yearlong program offered with A&S Unlimited Solutions called Violence No More, intended to motivate and empower youth.

Saturday, the ninth anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, was a good time to address the pervasive issue of violence nationwide, Lumpkin said. The five-hour event concluded with a prayer vigil at the center for victims of violence.

The event included community speakers like Racine Police Deputy Chief Art Howell, music, food and a talent contest with a grand prize of \$100.

Devanee Williams, 8, of Racine, said the \$100 prize is what made him dance.

"I want to buy my mom a car," said the Julian Thomas Elementary second-grader, making mom laugh.

Jessica Samuels, 21, of Racine, said she brings her son Devanee to the center every day.

"They were good," she said of Saturday's speeches. "Teens need to listen to it. They need to take the advice they were saying today."

Another speaker, Sammy Rangel, the program coordinator for Safe Haven's SAFE Streets Outreach program and a mental health therapist, shared his journey overcoming his past of drugs, gangs and prison. Rangel talked about his abusive childhood and how he acted out in hurt and anger, but nobody understood that.

"I wish someone would have asked me, taken the time to get to know me," he said.

Rangel advised the young people to share with someone what's going on in their lives and reminded them they, too, can rise above their past.

Deonta Washington, 18, of Racine, said Rangel's message stuck out to him. The recent Park High School graduate danced to "I Can Transform Ya" by Chris Brown. He won the contest.

"If you want to make the world a better place," Washington said, "the only way to do that is to transform yourself."