

## Around Annapolis: Spending time with Boys & Girls Clubs

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Reginald Broddie has seen it before: When the temperature goes up, so does the propensity for violence in some Annapolis neighborhoods.

With summer officially underway this week, the chief professional officer for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Annapolis & Anne Arundel County is putting his support behind a new initiative to keep local youth engaged in positive activities for a "murder-free summer."

"When you've got idle time and nothing to do, it gives young people an opportunity to create their own recreation," he said. "But 99 percent of the time, we're not going to be happy with what they create."

Paul Johnson Jr., teen coordinator at the Bates Boys and Girls Club on South Villa Avenue, is structuring the program around two pastimes he knows are popular with this age group: basketball and music.

The basketball program kicked off May 15 when 170 people turned out at the Bates courts to watch teams of youth and adults from public housing communities and other city neighborhoods compete against each other. Local activist Larry Griffin addressed the crowd and there were face painting and other family activities.

Last week the Annapolis All Stars adult team took on their counterparts from the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Washington, D.C. The D.C. team won the game 102 to 90, with about 80 youth and adults gathered to watch. "It was a great game with good sportsmanship," Paul said afterward.

The plan is to hold a game at least once a month. "It gives us a meeting ground for the communities to come out," Paul said.



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Collin Flannigan, 14, a rising eighth-grader at Bates  
Middle School, tests out the microphone in the  
recording studio at Bates Boys and Girls Club.*

Youth who find their outlet in making music keep the recording studio at the Bates Club humming.

The professional-looking setup is soundproofed and contains three computer work stations for mixing music and vocal tracks. Paul shows the teens and tweens how to arrange and produce their own music recordings using a variety of programs. Their lyrics are often about the issues they deal with every day, such as peer pressure, teenage pregnancy and their desire for "peace on the streets." The goal is to produce a compilation CD at the end of the summer.

"What I try to do is meet them half way," Paul said. "I allow them to voice their opinion."

He expects about 40 summer camp kids, ages 10 to 12, to test their skills as recording artists. During the school year, all ages dropped by after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays to work on their music projects.

Jaeron Wade, 14, had just finished his last day of eighth grade at Bates Middle School last week when he bopped into the studio, something he does every day. He also plays basketball.

"It can keep kids off the street and help kids have somebody to talk to," he said of the summer initiative.

David Blackstone, 15, played percussion in the marching band this year as a ninth-grader at Annapolis High School. In basketball, his position is strong forward. He likes to mess around with the percussion tracks in the Bates recording studio. "You just have fun coming together making music. That's what I love," he said.

Collin Flannigan, 14, a rising eighth-grader at Bates, donned some professional-looking headphones to test the studio's microphone. "I'm working on a rap (song) at home," he said. He's also working on getting more of his friends to come to the studio, he said.

As the Bates Club's summer schedule gets underway, city police continue to investigate the shooting death of 25-year-old Darius Stanley Johnson, who was found June 12 next to the basketball court outside the Robinwood recreation center.

While the cause of his death has not been determined, it's the "predictable violence" that Reggie and his staff hope to head off with the murder-free summer program. He believes that if young people from across the city spend time together and take a positive attitude back into their neighborhoods, ongoing tensions will ease.

"They think they have beefs with each other for no real reason," he said. "When opportunities are given, we see the most positive young people that can be seen."