

Peace & Education Coalition

of Back of the Yards, New City

www.peaceandeducation.org



(left) An Aztec dancer blesses the crowd participating in the Day of the Dead event this past fall at Cornell Park. This is one of over a hundred photos shared at a Neighborhood forum held at Davis Square Park this past November highlighting the involvement of young people in our community. Representatives of the 19 groups introduced themselves and their work to those who attended the tamale pot luck dinner. Many thanks to the Davis Square Park staff for their hospitality and to all who contributed for what turned out to be a festive evening.

Priorities in the Back of the Yards Neighborhood

The Peace and Education Coalition (PEC) meets the second Thursday of every month, inviting many agencies who provide a variety of services in neighborhood. These past months, the Coalition has worked to prioritize the needs of people and sought to identify action steps a task force could bring about in the next year. Listening to the people of the neighborhood is the most important task the Coalition works to carry out, through conversations and one-on-one meetings. One pastor, attending a recent meeting said, “I am amazed at the number of young adults who attend the Coalition meetings - it is a remarkable energy.” That meeting was attended by close to 70 representatives and residents from across the neighborhood. The conversations are valuable to eliciting a common vision and understanding what are the needs of a neighborhood and how they are addressed.

Since last June, 2019, when the Coalition gathered to evaluate the previous year, the question was asked, “What would you liked to see happen in the next year?” Six priorities were outlined by October and a task force was set up for each one. The Coalition identified: 1) Local School Promotion, to include highlighting the differences and effectiveness of our area public school; 2) Multi-Cultural relationships; 3) Holistic Wellness was a focus; 4) Civic Engagement with a special effort now for the 2020 Census and advocating for the remapping the political districts; 5) Youth and how we can support and identify new programs to support the youth in their development; and 6) Welcoming new residents, with a concern to develop relationships.

With these priorities, the year will be busy, but it is encouraging so many care.

PEACE & EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP “TASTE OF BACK OF THE YARDS”

SATURDAY, MAY 16TH, 2020, 11 AM AT CORNELL SQUARE PARK, 1809 W. 50TH STREET.

Mark your calendar for a special fundraising event to benefit the Peace and Education Scholarships - awarded to students pursuing a higher education and who are engaged in volunteer service in Back of the Yards. In addition to their volunteer service, students are invited to write essays and sit with a panel of judges to discuss their dreams and hopes. Last summer, 35 awards were given to students attending college. One of the students wrote about their experience of service: “I take pride in how I give back to the community. Giving back with service is a win-win situation. One gets to help out and learns to be selfless and live with empathy in their surroundings. They can also make connections with those they meet, and connections can lead to great places. ... Service is the human heart in bloom before our eyes. It takes a certain kind of person to give back while on their path to their dream, ... Those helping run things out of the kindness of their heart act as fuel [in our community] , and I am happy to aid in that way.”

How One Youth was Changed by Meeting the Elderly

When the college student, Julian, age 20, a psychology major, called asking for an opportunity to do some volunteer community service, he was not exactly motivated by a good will to give back with service. Rather, he was asked by the court to perform community service, after getting in trouble for a traffic violation speeding down a major highway. Julian was embarrassed, the family was not happy, and the Judge gave him a good amount of hours to complete. But most important was that he was given an opportunity to restore his sense of well-being. Studying for a college degree involves enough stress and having to perform community service would require some time commitment on his part, travel from his dorm room and some time for self-reflection.

With some consultation among PEC collaborators and his parents, he found a place to carry out his required community service at New City Supportive Living, a place for Senior Independent Living, in the Back of the Yards.

The student asked a little nervously, “What do I have to do?” Keep a journal, accompany the elderly during their breaks, play some board games with them and listen to their stories. He called the manager of the facility, Aisha Burke, and arranged the times. Recently, he described some lessons he learned by spending time accompanying the elderly.

“They told me a lot about their family history and I found out a lot of them are from Georgia and Louisiana, places like that. They told how their parents taught them how to plant cotton, corn, beets... and they told me about their struggles in school, and how they got used to being segregated. They thought things would never change. I thought the elderly were going to be grouches, but my experience was just the opposite. My stereotypes were eliminated the first day I met them. They took an interest in me and my culture, and how I grew up and they wanted to hear my music! I ended up playing songs and singing for them. They liked it so much I did two encores with the flute I brought. I even ended up going shopping with them and sang songs on the shuttle bus. The best part for me was seeing how happy they were, just to have a visitor even. Now, I tell others about my volunteering in the home and I encourage them to go.” Julian finished telling of his experience: “Once we do something like this, a person turns their life around. I would recommend it to anyone.”

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Go to www.peaceandeducation.org to DONATE and support the PEC & the Scholarships.