

# Teens get to teach and learn

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ANSONIA — Eight Valley teens have been acting as role models while working with children at a day camp at the Boys & Girls Club of the Lower Naugatuck Valley, Joel E. Smilow Clubhouse.

They are among 50 who are employed in Teens Work, a summer program sponsored by Training, Education and Manpower Inc. of Derby. The six-week program is funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Meshaya McClung, 17, of Ansonia, said “working with (the children) definitely keeps you upbeat.” She and Shelly Dutan, 16, also of Ansonia, are two of the teens who have been working with a group of girls who are ages 8-12.

The group has been involved in activities ranging from computer games to dancing and script writing. Last week the girls performed an original play for the whole club.

“I let them pick a topic,” McClung said. “We helped them write a script, and we directed them. They had to get costumes and learn their lines.”

McClung plans to major in musical theater at the University of Bridgeport.

The play, called “Which Way?” deals with a girl who was new to her school and had to decide with whom to be friends.

McClung said, “The idea is to not get involved in cliques at a new school.” She said she brought in theater games to play with the girls to teach acting skills.

Dutan added, “We teach them, and they teach us.”

In the gym a group of boys was involved in a baseball game. Ansonia resident and teen employee Patrick England, 14, was the pitcher. He said he has enjoyed the job program, which ends Friday.

He hopes he is chosen to work again next summer, he said. Employees are chosen by lottery. More than 100 teens had applied this summer.

Staff member Adam Manning of Derby said England works well with the younger boys. “He relates to the kids,” Manning said. “Our numbers keep going up. We have more here than last summer. If we didn’t have the extra help (with the summer employees) we’d be outnumbered.”

Later on, the girls took part in a dance class and Zumba aerobic exercise.

Katya Kazachknova, 9, of Ansonia said during a break in the high-energy dance class that she was having

fun. She said she played “the lead popular girl” in the play. “It was a lot of learning (lines),” she said. “I wrote some of it.”

Shelton resident Jada Middle, 11, said the Zumba fitness class was fun. “It gets your energy pumped up. It’s healthy and it doesn’t seem like you’re exercising.”

Shannon Beach, Teens Work coordinator, said youths had been working at Seymour Public Library, Seymour Town Hall, Derby Neck Library and Shelton’s Huntington Branch Library, among other sites.

TEAM President and CEO Richard Knoll said, “A summer job is an opportunity for a young person to try something new, to learn about their interests, to be a positive member of their community, and to earn some money at the same time.

“The program opens the door for the teen participants to learn what work is all about, to learn lessons of what employers will want and to learn what types of skills they will need to achieve success.”

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