

ZAM's Hope Community Resource Center hosted a successful Third Annual Walk Against Violence on Sunday, July 29, 2007. The Walk is an annual youth-created event to raise awareness of the problem of violence in our neighborhoods. Shouting out such slogans as "Stop the hate! We want peace!," the Walkers conveyed a strong message of anti-violence to drivers, pedestrians, and local businesses. The march was lead by the 24th District Chicago Police Department. The Walk received a wonderful turnout of 175 participants.

The march was preceded by a short ceremony that featured notable community leaders. Zehra Quadri, President of ZAM's Hope, expressed her thanks to attendees and spoke of her agency's commitment to serving the low-income community. Notable V.I.P. guests included State Senator Ira I. Silverstein, 8th District; Alderman Joe Moore, 49th Ward; Sergeant Peter Koconis, 24th District Police; Andrew Fernandez, Director of City of Chicago Dept. of Children and Youth Services; Iftekhhar Shareef, ZAM's Hope Advisory Board member; and Tariq Siddiqui, community leader.

Senator Silverstein expressed how important the issue of neighborhood safety is to him, and he asserted that the Walk Against Violence would function as deterrence against further crime. Alderman Moore echoed the Senator's wishes for a peaceful community and stated how much he enjoyed supporting ZAM's Hope's events. Sergeant Koconis stressed the importance of everyone doing their part by working with the police to stop crime. He emphasized that with cell phones, alerting the police of violent activities has become an easier task. Mr. Fernandez spoke of Children and Youth Service's commitment to supporting ZAM's Hope, and Mr. Shareef and Mr. Siddiqui asserted that the Walk was an event that benefited the entire community.

The youth gave a presentation about the best way to handle school bullying. Awards were then presented to honor those who support ZAM's Hope's mission. The Best Donor Award went to Taj Sari Palace; the Best Supporter Award went to Alderman Joe Moore, 49th Ward; Certificates of Appreciation were received by the 24th District Chicago Police Department and Noor Meat Market; the Best Volunteer Award went to Shaheen Ameer; the Excellent Teacher Award went to Sarai Correa for the karate lessons she volunteers to ZAM's Hope's youth; and Awards for Excellence were received by Assiyah Abdullah, Taran Preet Singh, Maryam Quadri, and Palwinder Singh for their outstanding leadership in the Summer Youth Program.

The march itself was a memorable experience for all involved. Lead by Sergeant Koconis and the V.I.P. guests, the Walkers expressed their desire for a peaceful community as they marched proudly along Devon Avenue to California Avenue. Volunteers Darian Spearman and Arian Pubin shouted out anti-violence slogans for the marchers to repeat. Drivers and pedestrians waved, honked car horns, and flashed peace signs to show their support of the cause. All Walkers were excited to wear "Walk Against Violence" t-shirts that ZAM's Hope had printed especially for the day. When the Walkers marched back to ZAM's Hope, they let out a big cheer to celebrate the event's completion. Refreshments were then served for all.

The Walk is a youth-created program. Several years ago, several victims of violence within our neighborhood asked ZAM's Hope for help. The youth in the after-school program decided to take a stand against violence by organizing this Walk. Violent crime remains a problem in our community, and our youth continue to raise awareness of the issue. The youth take an active role in recruiting walkers and making posters and banners for the march. The Walk Against Violence was generously supported by local restaurants and donors who donated food, water, and juice for the event.

ZAM's Hope is a not-for-profit organization in Chicago's northside that has been empowering low-income families since 2000. Its services include: after-school tutoring, computer skills classes, immigration support, job placement, referrals, grocery distributions, and cultural programming. Plans for the future include relocating the center to a bigger space and opening a kitchen that will serve healthy, hot meals to senior citizens and low income families. The 7th Annual Benefit Dinner is scheduled for November 10, 2007. Please contact ZAM's Hope if you would like to donate or volunteer your time. For more information, please view the website at www.zamshope.net.