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## D.I.Y. Youth Programs

**Rather than relying on the city or an existing non-profit to help tackle youth issues, the following people are going the do-it-yourself route.**

By Betsy Yagla

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**Lindsey Ruminski** runs the Jesus Children Bible Academy out of her home in Dixwell.

Ruminski has run the nonprofit since 1991 and funds it herself. Back then, she had 30 eight-year-olds. Now, most of her students are teenage girls and "we talk about peer pressure, youth and sex and dating, using the Bible as a foundation." The group meets at her house after school. Three of her students graduated high school last year and went on to college. Another just tried out for the police department. "I've been very blessed," she says.

**Sharon "Fly" Greene** owns and operates Fly's House of Style on Dixwell Avenue.

Though not a youth program per se, the barbershop is a popular hangout for teenage boys. They play chess in the evenings and Fly talks to them about teenage sex and neighborhood violence. "They tell me things they don't tell their parents," she says. Fly believes in positive reinforcement and will give a free haircut to kids with As and Bs on their report cards. "I do it because it gives them an initiative to do better." Plus, she adds, "Being around the kids keeps me young."

**John Baird**, a Yale student, runs a comic strip workshop out of the New Haven Free Public Library for elementary-age kids.

Baird started the program while teaching English in Taiwan, encouraging students to use their English skills creatively. The weekly class helps kids foster creativity in their writing and draws pupils from across New Haven. "I always try to encourage my students to write large, ambitious stories, even if they can't fully express it, because it helps their skills grow," he says.

**Terrence Lee** gives free shoes to kids who earn good grades and at the start of the school year.

"I make them do push-ups or jumping jacks or something, to make them feel like they earned it," he says. Normally, he sells Air Jordans from a card table on Winthrop Avenue for \$75. He does it, he says, because kids don't have anything to look forward to these days. "They want to go to school looking nice, but they take the wrong avenue to get there," he says. "The easy way is to grab a gun and rob somebody. I went through all of that and I try to prevent the kids from going through what I went through."

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