

# FRATERNITY LEADS RALLY AGAINST VIOLENT LIVES

*Teenagers try to bring Latino and black kids together in stand against gangs*

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by Mike Cetera –Staff Writer

AURORA -- A bullet lodged in the left leg of high school student Jordan Handley serves as a daily reminder of the playground violence to which he was subjected several years ago. But the shooting didn't stop him from getting in trouble. Getting caught selling drugs did.

A year after landing in jail and getting suspended from school, Handley says he's turned his life around. Now part of a rap group at East Aurora High School, the 17-year-old senior says he has plans to go to college.

Handley brought his rhymes and his message to halt violence to an Aurora youth rally Saturday aimed at showcasing young role models as examples to other children.

"I think to myself, we got to stop all the killing," Handley said. "We got to stop all the violence in the community."

Hundreds attended the youth summit at Prisco Community Center, where young Latino and African-American men shared their experiences.

The meeting, sponsored by the Boys II Men Fraternity, featured nearly one dozen teenagers who shared their own stories in the hope of influencing children in the audience.

Several people who spoke had prior involvement with gangs or drug dealing. They pleaded with the young people in the crowd not to get mixed up with crime.

One former drug dealer showed a graphic picture of his own injuries, sustained during a beating when he told his partners he no longer wished to sell drugs. The beating nearly killed the man and helped convince him to try to spread the message to youngsters not to become involved with gangs.

A teenager, Octavio Donatlan, said he was failing his freshman year of high school and was about to get involved with gangs when he met Clayton Muhammad, who founded the academy two years ago. Donatlan now is one of the group's leaders, has improved his grades at West Aurora High School and plans to become a pastor after graduation.

"When I slip, they are always there for me," Donatlan, 16, said of the group.

Muhammad said 40 young men are now involved with the academy, which tries to decrease gang violence through education, enrichment and empowerment. Teenagers involved are mentored and participate in workshops and field trips with the goal of bringing Latino and black youth together.

Teenagers involved with the program said they hoped to reach other children who might be tempted by gangs. They asked the audience why black and Latino youth don't seem to get along, why success in school is viewed negatively. And they called on adults to do more to help kids achieve.

"The message is, I would say to stop talking and do something about it," said Jared Marchiando-Muhammad, another of the group's leaders. Marchiando-Muhammad, 16, is the son of Clayton Muhammad.

Marchiando-Muhammad said he hopes children can become the leaders in fighting violence in Aurora.

"It's the youth that need to come together," he said.



*Co-Presidents of the Boys II Men Fraternity, Jared Marchiando-Muhammad (l) and Octavio Donatlan (r) share a brotherhood that transcends race and encourage others to do the same.*