

STUDENTS HELPING STUDENTS



Catherine Avalone/Middletown Press Staff

Wesleyan University senior Lindsay Slabich, a work-study student, helps Aquila Turner, 14, of Woodrow Wilson Middle School, with her homework at the Community Health Center's HomeRoom program.

Officials tour city after-school program

By AMY L. ZITKA

Middletown Press Staff

MIDDLETOWN — On four days a week, students gather to receive homework help and play games after school in a safe environment in the North End.

On Friday, the Community Health Center's HomeRoom after-school program was open an extra day for city students as U.S. Sen. Christopher Dodd

and city officials toured the site. Dodd saw the homework, art and computer areas of the program's location.

"The Community Health Center really saw a need for it," HomeRoom Coordinator Nat Holmes said. The facility, located at 635 Main St., has been open for four years. "As soon as it opened in 1993, kids were pouring in."

"It's a safe environment and a fun environment," Holmes said. "The main

mission is to get kids to do their homework."

The program is open to children from first grade through high school, with the majority aged 7 to 13. HomeRoom is supported by small amounts of funding, including from the city, and community gifts and donations. The rest is supported through the

See AFTER-SCHOOL, A5

After-school program toured by officials

•From A1

Community Health Center's general fund.

The HomeRoom program is connected to Macdonough Elementary School and its services are provided at both locations for children having difficulty with their studies.

To assist with one-on-one homework and tutoring, the HomeRoom program relies on volunteers. Program employees include Holmes and two support staff. Volunteers come in from the community, Wesleyan University and Middletown High School.

"We're doing well now, but we still need more people," Holmes said.

After visiting each station in the "kid-friendly" facility, Dodd answered questions from the staff, city officials and some of the students who were at the HomeRoom program.

"These kids are so lucky to have a community to promote some programs for the younger elementary and middle school students," Dodd said. He added there are about 5 million children who are home alone after school. "That's why these programs are important. They are

structured with the fun things, computers and learning experiences."

Prudence Burger, an 8-year-old Macdonough student, attends the HomeRoom program and enjoys coming to the facility.

"It's good," she said. "I like it a lot because it helps with my homework and reading."

The Senate will be introducing a five-year, \$3.25 billion child-care bill next week, Dodd said. A portion of the child care bill will include after-school programs. He added only about 35 percent of the schools have after-school programs for students.

"It's frustrating to parents who are driving by the schools that are shut down," after the school day is over, Dodd said. He said the buildings should be used more of the time.

When working on the child-care bill, Dodd said: "We're going to really push that piece of it."