

# Middletown program offers homework help

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*Current Staff Writer*

MIDDLETOWN — Little hands start knocking on the door at 635 Main St. right about 4 p.m., when The Homeroom first opens for the day.

Operated by the Community Health Center, the free learning center began its second full year this month, and has no shortage of kids who come in search of help with homework and a few hours of after-school fun.

What The Homeroom is short on is volunteers. The more individual attention the children can get, the more they will benefit, said Diana Christinson, coordinator of the program. She pointed to a 12-year-old sitting alone and asked whether he was working on school work. If someone were sitting down with him, asking him questions and giving him encouragement, it would make a difference, she said. Luckily, Christinson's husband, Jeff, arrived after his workday, and she quickly assigned him to the

youngster. Soon, the pair were going through the boy's work together.

"I like to come every day," said Roshani Petway, 8, a third-grader who is new to The Homeroom this fall but who plans to make it part of her daily program. "It's fun and stuff. They help us out with our homework and let us play games and with computers."

For her daily journal entry, Roshani wrote Tuesday afternoon: "One time, I really made someone feel special, because she was sad."

Although still in elementary school, Roshani has no problem connecting her third-grade school work to her future.

"When you grow up and go to college you have to be smart so you can get yourself a good job," Roshani said.

After spending an hour doing her homework, Roshani was eager to hit the computer lab, where several workstations are loaded with programs that let kids play games, learn geography, or create their

own cities and towns, which they add to every day.

Many of the volunteers who stop in aren't on a schedule, but are in the neighborhood and know the importance of giving kids a positive place to be. The center needs about 20 people willing to volunteer, demonstrate a craft or talent or help youngsters with school work.

Elixon Lopez, 27, once rated a top break-dancer in the state, is one such visitor to The Homeroom. When he was raised in Bridgeport, Lopez said, he danced competitively to keep busy and it helped him keep out of trouble.

Lopez danced as opening act for many bands and has appeared on television several times, including on a Jerry Lewis telethon to help raise money for children's charity, he said.

Lopez performed for the kids at The Homeroom last week. When he came through the door Tuesday afternoon, Ray Rivas, 7, lit up, shouting out that the

Please see Homeroom, Page B4

1624

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Mary Glass, a volunteer at The Homeroom in Middletown, reads "Fossils Tell of Long Ago" with Jessica Jones, 7, and Teresa Rustek, 11.

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