

Kennedy-King League offers hope

Program teaches responsibility as well as basketball

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The 96 youths in the Kennedy-King Youth Basketball League are doing their part to show young people in a positive light.

Two years ago, Bernard J. Meyer, the executive director of the Williamsport Housing Authority, created an outreach initiative that would address the needs of the community. He realized that the youth in the community lacked direction and were bored.

"The kids don't have anything to do, they have no supervision," said Leslie Houseweart, a member of the residence council at the Kennedy-King housing project. "It's surprising to me how little attention they get ... They need positive people."

The housing authority decided to provide kids with a positive atmosphere through something they wanted — a chance to play organized basketball.

Under the direction of program administrator Loni Gamble, the Williamsport Housing Authority became the main sponsor of the Kennedy-King Basketball League.

Any child interested in playing basketball ages 11 to 16 in the area can join the Kennedy-King Basketball League. However, there is a catch. In order to be in



MELANIE BAIRD/Sun-Gazette

Spirited action takes place between the Kellogg's Wizards, in yellow, and the South Williamsport team, both Kennedy-King Youth Basketball League members, at the West End Park recently.

the league, each child must perform community service.

The players are responsible for the upkeep of the West End Park at the Kennedy-King complex, where they play their games, and must set up before and break down after each game. The players also must attend workshops that teach kids how to make well-informed decisions and how to handle difficult situations.

"We felt we had to give them re-

sponsibilities, such as having them participate in the workshops and clean the park," Gamble said. "We were hoping that once they saw the rewards of participating in the community, they would want to continue doing it."

Gamble said that what they were trying to instill in the kids — a responsibility and concern about maintaining their community — was reinforced with the support from their sponsors. For example,

the Williamsport-Lycoming Foundation provided \$10,000 grant to the league for their new electronic scoreboard, bleachers and concession stand. Numerous other sponsors in the area also donated to the league.

Gamble said the support that has been provided from the sponsors has shown the kids that when they care for and help maintain their community, the community will help them.

"A lot of us didn't realize how much people did for us — we didn't see how important the work was," said Adam Walker a 16-year-old from Williamsport who has been in the league for over a year. "All the grant money and work that went into it — I saw this after working."

Gamble said that at first the kids were a little skeptical of the community service idea, but just as he had hoped, the kids have found they are enjoying helping out their community and taking pride in their work.

"It's fun — we get to enjoy time with our friends and I like helping people out," said Jasper Bragg, a 16-year-old league player from Williamsport.

Alphonso Kelly, a 12-year-old league player from Williamsport also enjoys doing the mandatory

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