



New Club employee reaches out to pre-teen members

by Dan Murphy | Charlestown Patriot Bridge | March 6, 2008



CAPTION: Charlestown Boys & Girls Club pre-teen specialist Zizi Abdel-Ghaffar (center) is seen with Club members Taylor Adams (at left) and Li Mei.

Last year, Zizi Abdel-Ghaffar was brought on board to help reinvigorate the Charlestown Boys & Girls Club's pre-teen membership after 10- to 12-year-olds were identified as the age group most in need of outreach, and so far, the results have been impressive.

Abdel-Ghaffar, who was named the Club's pre-teen specialist on Dec. 26, brings extensive experience in the field of youth counseling. The daughter of a daycare provider, she began volunteering as a youth worker for the City of Cambridge as a high school student and continued this work while attending Suffolk College. "I literally would leave class to help them as often as I could," she said. Abdel-Ghaffar worked in real estate for a short time after her earning an undergraduate degree from Suffolk in 2004, but she was unsatisfied with the position and soon returned to youth work.

In her current role, Abdel-Ghaffar allows members to help plan activities at the Club — an approach that she hopes will sustain their interest and put them at ease.

"I want them to have a voice in what they're doing because that's going to keep them going," Abdel-Ghaffar said. "We're really trying to set the comfort level with the kids, then go from there."

To date, Abdel-Ghaffar has launched the Townie Study program, which offers kids cash incentives to those who come in and do their homework quietly. She is also heading up evening cooking classes that will include "behind the scenes" tours of local restaurants.

"I want them to know how big the world is outside the Club," said Abdel-Ghaffar, adding that a number of field trips are currently in the works for pre-teen members.

Abdel-Ghaffar and members are also now planning to open a pre-teen center in the basement level of the

Green Street site that would contain book games, furniture, a television and possibly a ping-pong table. "It will be almost like a mini Club down there," Abdel-Ghaffar said.

Taylor Adams, a 10-year-old member, said Abdel-Ghaffar's efforts are helping to break down cliques within the Club.

"Some kids used to come and hang out with just kids from their schools or their neighborhoods," Adams said. "Now, they're getting to know more kids."

Abdel-Ghaffar is also considering launching separate support groups for male and female members. "This would be aimed at helping the kids get to know each other better without distractions and to open up discussion about what's bothering them," she said.

As the year progresses, Abdel-Ghaffar also hopes to introduce more activities to keep pre-teen members interested in the Club.

"I want to change it up for them so they have a reason to come to the Club every day," she said.

For more information about the Charlestown Boys & Girls Club, call 617-242-1775.