

Ja Rule Returns To Old Neighbor'hood

Written by Westside ID162
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Southeast Queens-bred rapper Ja Rule returned to his old "hood Friday to help troubled kids turn their lives around.

Ja Rule, a performer who grew up in Hollis, officially launched the Love Ignites Freedom and Education - or LIFE - Foundation at a Friday news conference in downtown Jamaica's Harvest Room to provide struggling teens with an incentive to stay in school and succeed.

"It's hard growing up where I come from," Ja Rule said. "This is a foundation that's put together to give kids a second chance."

The program started last year by working with more than 300 students in the southeast Queens community through August Martin High School in Jamaica and other community-based groups, said Erica Ford, who runs the foundation for Ja Rule.

"There are a tremendous amount of killings in South Jamaica," she said. "We are tired of seeing young people killing themselves."

Last year the 103rd Precinct, based in downtown Jamaica, had one of the worst murder rates in the city with 29 deaths. This year there have been 13 killings through Sept. 19, according to crime statistics.

This year the program is expanding into Far Rockaway High School and Thomas Jefferson High School in Brooklyn. Ford is also working with teens from the South Jamaica and Baisley public housing complexes, she said.

LIFE takes the students who have the poorest academic, attendance and behavior records and gives them access to counseling, arts, literature and other extra-curricular programs, Ford said.

"We want to work with some of the worst kids there, the kids no one else wants to work with," she said.

Those who show the most improvement are rewarded with a variety of opportunities. Ja Rule has taken some students to basketball games and a few are going to the Source Hip-Hop awards in Miami. The program's ultimate goal is to create a 10-day camp in Puerto Rico for the teens, Ford said.

"The way to go is by bringing in letters from their parents and teachers on how they produce," she said of the rewards. "If you want to go, you have to do the work."

Ja Rule, whose real name is Jeffrey Atkins, grew up in Hollis and went to John Adams High School in Ozone Park, but he left school without graduating, he said.

"I got lucky," Ja Rule said. "I dropped out. The streets were my only home."

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Ja Rule's fortunes changed when he started rapping, and now he is known for hits such as "Holla, Holla," "Mesmerize" and his new single, "Wonderful." He has also appeared in movies, including "The Fast and the Furious."

Ja Rule said he came back to his old neighborhood to help the community.

"It's time to give back from those who have a little more time and money," he said. "I can really relate to these situations."

The move won praise from many, including Robert Hogan, head of the Baisley Houses tenant group.

"The young brothers and sisters look up to artists and a lot of them don't come back to the community. There's more work to be done in the "hood." Source: [TimesLedger](#)