

Rally celebrates programs for kids (The News Journal)

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WILMINGTON --

Sharon Lee is a working single mom with two daughters at Warner Elementary School. When the dismissal bell rings, she knows they have a place to go, because they are both enrolled in an after-school program there.

"It is super, super important," she said of the program. "We're new to the area, and I was very scared about where they were going to go. I don't know what I'd do without it. My kids might possibly be latchkey kids, which is very scary. It gives me a lot of peace of mind."

Lee and her daughters were among more than 100 celebrants at Warner on Thursday taking part in a Lights On After School! rally to bring attention to after-school programs.

Naturally, the celebration was held after school, and Lee took off work to be there because she believes in the programs.

Lights

On After School! is a project of the Washington, D.C.-based National Afterschool Alliance. According to the alliance, about 7,500 Lights On events were held nationwide Thursday, including 45 in Delaware.

The celebration at Warner was hosted by Project CHANCE, or Children's Health, Achievement, Nutrition and Community Empowerment. Through a partnership with the Red Clay Consolidated School District, it runs after-school programs at three sites, Warner and Lewes elementary schools and Shortlidge Academy.

Students

in programs at all three of the schools -- about 130 children -- gathered at Warner for music, cake and an appearance by Rep. Mike Castle, R-Del.

"We've

tried to help with funding, tried to encourage meetings like this to show the importance of it," he said of the programs. "It's sometimes not available for the kids, and we should make the extra effort to reach out to them."

Virginia

Lacy, director of Project CHANCE, said more than 14,000 students in Delaware need after-school programs but are unable to take part in them for one reason or other.

"The children need that foundation, to keep them safe off the streets and provide an extension to their education," she said.

Most of the children in the programs have working parents, she said.

Children

in both before- and after-school programs at the three Red Clay schools receive help with their homework, attend summer camp, learn life skills, listen to talks by professionals, eat breakfast and dinner and go on field trips.

"We're

not going to be a baby-sitting agency," Lacy said. "We're going to expose these students to a lot of the things they should be exposed to."

Parents pay \$60 a week, but the fee is on a sliding scale, and most receive some assistance, Lacy said.

"A lot of the parents can't afford it even though we're one of the lowest prices in town," she said.

Darryl

Nabinett, who lives with his girlfriend and her daughter, a second-grader at Warner, said he appreciates the program, because both he and his girlfriend work.

"We'd have to get out of work early. We would have to cut off our time working to come get her," he said. "And it saves time for us when we get home. We know the homework is done."

Fourth-grader

Levon Jackson, 10, likes the friends he is making at the program. Also, his single mom is recovering from a car accident, and it helps that she does not have to worry about him as she heals.