



Gazette photo by Kristen Hanmer

Choir Members of the Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation, a New York City non-profit that provides after school programs perform several songs, including "Can You Feel the Love Tonight," "I Say a Little Prayer" and "Respect," earning a standing ovation from the crowd. SASF is one of several program providers that demonstrated the success of their programs at last Tuesday's event.

## After-school success stories

By KRISTEN HANMER

*Gazette staff writer*

Children who attend after-school programs showcased their successes during performances in the Well of the Legislative Office Building last week to show lawmakers that after-school funding is money well spent.

The Afterschool Jamboree at the Capitol was one part of a three-day conference hosted by the New York 21st Century Community Learning Centers Statewide Technical Assistance Center. The center provides training and assistance for programs that keep children occupied and engaged during non-school hours. State-funded programs were present as well, including the Advantage After School Program.

The conference consisted of workshops and networking events for program providers, but last Tuesday's afternoon event was a more personal way of showing what after school programs can accomplish.

"The purpose of this specific event is to put a face with the funds," said Felicia Watson, director of the center. "What I essentially wanted to do was bring these after school program providers together to come here to the Legislative Office Building so that legislators can see how their dollars are being spent."

Grace Stumberg, a 20-year-old Buffalo area resident, performed an original song called "Change the World," with lyrics meant to inspire others to realize their potential. Stumberg said the program Music in Action, designed for high school students with an interest in the

music industry, helped her realize her goal of being a performer. "For myself and other students, it gave us a reason to want to come to school," she said. "It really inspired us. Before this, I never had a career path, I didn't know where I was headed. It kind of lit the fire inside of me and made me realize I enjoyed music and I wanted to take it up as a career. If it weren't for the program, I wouldn't be here today and I'd probably be drifting and not knowing my own voice inside."

Watson said it is important for children to be involved in after-school activities because, not only does it benefit them academically, socially and emotionally, it keeps them in a safe environment. "This isn't entertainment," she said. "This is keeping kids out of court, keeping kids off drugs, keeping kids out of anti-social behavior, and that's what after school programming does."

Katha Cato, director of after school services for the Henry St. Settlement's Youth Services, a social services agency in New York City's Lower East Side, spoke to program providers at the event and applauded the work they do. But she also spoke of recent funding cuts, including to her organization, and called for increased

funding to provide more after school opportunities.

"It is a national epidemic that children are at home, or worse, on the streets. If we don't find something to do between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. it will devastate our communities," she said. "Because the gangs are recruiting and they've got plenty of materials. That's what we're competing against; we're competing against the streets."



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Grace Stumberg, 20, of Buffalo sings an original song, "Change the World," inspired by an after school program she participated in that she says helped her realize her potential.