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# Open Mic Night at Kula Cafe

## Young people share poems, music and life's moments

By DON STINE

The Kula Cafe in Asbury Park is alive with music at least one special Saturday night every month.

For one Saturday every month, usually the third Saturday, young people in their teens and twenties join community members of all ages to share their poems, favorite writers, music, and moments of life that matter the most during the Konscious Youth Development & Service's (KYDS) Open Mic Night.

The young people can bring their own instruments, read out loud, sing, or just talk about important moments in their life. People attending might hear the poetry of Langston Hughes or the lyrics of Otis Redding. Everyone is respected and all are welcome.

Teasia Ruffin, 19, one of Interfaith Neighbor's Kula Café training graduates, has not missed an open mic night since they began in December.

"It's positive vibes --just coming to hear other people's writings and see their talents," Teasia said. "Some people sing; some people rap. It's good for people to see this happening. It brings curiosity to the café."

Open Mic Night, which was created by three 27-year-old local professionals, is usually held the

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-Interfaith Neighbors Associate Director Paul McEvily.

third Saturday of the month but always check in advance.

Mychal Mills, who earned degrees in business at Monmouth University, is a food sourcing supervisor at FoodBank of Monmouth and Ocean counties. He started the Big Brothers Big Sisters program while at Monmouth University and got to know about Interfaith.

Mills became friends with Rodney Salomon, a youth development specialist with Asbury Park High School's after-school programs. He is also a Monmouth University graduate with a degree in social work. The third partner in the venture is Jean-Paul Saintil- a childhood friend of Mills. Saintil graduated from St. Peter's University and recently began operating the Shore Club Shave Parlor & Salon on Third Avenue.

Mills said his commitment is focused on being a part of the positive change in Asbury Park so that "young people are becoming

elevated in their lives."

"I've been blessed with opportunities in my life and I want to make sure they have them as well," he said.

"The beauty of all this is to express ourselves," Salomon said. "We try to share information relevant to our community and make young people see things from different perspectives."

"We are so pleased to be able to host the K.Y.D.S. Open Mic Nights at the Kula Café," said Interfaith Neighbors Associate Director Paul McEvily. "This initiative fits perfectly with Interfaith's desire to have the café function as a community gathering place, offering opportunities for positive engagement and interaction among all ages.

"What they are doing with these open mic nights is encouraging on so many levels. We applaud their efforts and hope the initiative continues to grow and expand in the months and years to come," he said.

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