

Tribune Chronicle

Group keeps kids on track with meet

ASAP pushes positive life choices during summer competition



Staff photo / R. Michael Semple Shoichiro Saito, 7, of Champion, left, winds up and throws the ball as volunteer Deborah Tominey of Niles records his distance during the softball throw at the ASAP summer track meet Saturday at the Warren G. Harding Track and Field Complex.

WARREN — Thomas Natale is on track to make many positive choices in his life — even in response to those inevitable occasions in which he will expect a fastball and life instead will toss him a curveball.

“It’s a good thing to give you when you grow up,” he said about learning ways at a young age to make good decisions.

Thomas, 8, of Warren, also was among the children who took part in a friendly competitive softball throw, which kicked off Saturday’s sixth annual Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention Summer Track Meet at the Warren G. Harding Track and Field Complex, 860 Elm Road NE.

Thomas, who was part of the Maplewood Track Team, was referring specifically to the importance of being taught at an early age to make healthful life choices and avoiding drugs, alcohol, gambling and other addictions, which also was the four-hour event’s underlying theme.

He cited several examples of exuding such a lifestyle, including studying for tests and being kind to everyone.

“It’s important for kids to have activities to do to keep them engaged in positive things and healthy things, and showing them the right way,” Natasha Natale, Thomas’ mother, observed.

The track meet also can be an avenue to encourage children and teens to be more physically active and spend less time playing video games and on their phones, she said.

An estimated 230 young people ages 4 to 16 registered for the event, sponsored by ASAP, a community-oriented coalition established in 1985 that consists of health professionals, educators, elected officials, parents, those in recovery, business members, students and law-enforcement personnel. The organization, which is part of the Trumbull County Mental Health and Recovery Board, engages in strategic community partnerships to tackle substance-abuse problems and promote the importance of making positive life choices.

Also among those aiming to make such decisions is Shoichiro Saito, 7, of Champion, who participated in the softball throw and ran in the 100- and 200-meter dashes.

“It’s important to stay away from drugs,” said Shoichiro, who listed dodgeball as his favorite sport.

Accompanying the boy was his father, Kentaro Saito, who echoed his son’s desire to make healthful choices, including avoiding substance abuse.

“Kids who are involved with their families and community activities are less likely to engage in drugs and alcohol,” Laura Domitrovich, event chairwoman, said. *“The earlier we start, the better.”*

Participants were able to compete in up to four events, which also included the 50-, 400-, 800- and 1,600-meter dashes, the long and high jumps, the shot put and discus.

In addition, the meet had available a variety of educational resources for parents and activities for children to help them keep the young people drug-free. They included a health and wellness scavenger hunt, along with a program called *“I Can,”* which Rise Recovery of Warren sponsored.

Rise Recovery seeks to help teens, young adults and their families overcome the effects of drug and alcohol addictions while partnering with community entities in prevention and education efforts via medication-assisted treatment and counseling services, according to its mission statement.

A vital step is to show young people they have the inherent power to make positive life decisions and to *“encourage them that they can put their mind to it in a healthy way,”* Stephanie Bardash, the medication-assisted treatment program’s coordinator, noted.

Agencies that took part in the scavenger hunt were Rise Recovery, Trumbull County Children Services, the Trumbull Action Group Drug Task Force, Meridian HealthCare, ASAP, Mercy Health Dental Center and Compass Family and Community Services.

Among the songs that played during the 100-meter dash was *“Stand Up and be Strong,”* a 2006 hit by Soul Asylum.

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