

One Peace Festival: Modeling A Community of Belonging

Edwin Anderson grew up on the southeast side of Grand Rapids. An area of the city he still calls home today. For him, Hip Hop has always had an impact on the way he interacts and understands his community and the world.

“I feel like as a kid, and growing up here in Grand Rapids, we haven't really had a space to really know what Hip Hop really is, other than just the musical part,” he says. “But there's multiple elements that create cohesively what Hip Hop actually is other than just rap. So sometimes people can get lost in thinking that Hip Hop is just one thing, but it's actually a mode of multiple different elements that helped create the culture itself.”

Getting to build that sense of collective community is what prompted him to organize the One Peace Festival alongside Grand Rapids resident, Matthew Duncan. One Peace Festival is a one day all ages event highlighting Hip Hop as well as health and wellness.

Hosted at Campau Park in the southeast side of Grand Rapids near where Edwin grew up, the festival drew hundreds of people to participate. Residents Edwin says were hungry to interact with one another in meaningful ways.

“The Festival's purpose was to bring the community together to promote unity in this time of division,” he adds.

The last year and half, Edwin says, has demonstrated how lonely people feel and the importance of neighbor-to-neighbor community building.

With music booming through the park as dozens of youth dribbled their basketballs through the court, One Peace Festival successfully hosted over one hundred families at the event. Edwin says it was the perfect balance of fun and movement.

“I think the importance of being able to have this event was to help create a sense of community,” he states.

“And among that, being able to have many, many different people of all different backgrounds and being able to come together and be in a shared environment of positive energy, and promote a healthy lifestyle,” he states is important.

The event invited food businesses owned by Black, Indigenous and People of Color and those business owners located in the southeast side of Grand Rapids to showcase their food.

“We had local businesses and organizations able to come out and support being in a space to help build relationships with community members,” Edwin explains.

Hosting a free event that incorporates his love of Hip-Hop and benefits the community is something he hopes others take notice of and replicate.

"We need opportunities to come together in safe ways. I want to continue modeling that for my community, " he adds.

For Edwin, being able to host this event was the opportunity of a lifetime. An opportunity he hopes to take every year to continue to create community through the One Peace Festival.

"So creating this space, and being able to execute and make it happen was one of the best things I'd say I've done so far in my life, and I really appreciate being able to create this opportunity," Edwin explains.