

Culture connection

By Paul Babin

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SANDWICH -

Families with Asian adopted children gathered together for the seventh annual Asian Culture Camp at Camp Burgess last weekend.

The program featured a variety of workshops and events for parents and children exploring Asian culture and the Asian-American identity.

The Asian Culture Society of Cape Cod sponsored the event.

About 125 people signed up this year, the most in the camp's history, according to the society's director Barry Powers. Powers established the Asian Culture Camp in 2003 when his Chinese adopted daughter was six years old.

"It was a dream to bring families together with adopted children from Asian," Powers says.

The camp's mission is "to bring families together to make friends, build community, connect with Asian culture and develop pride in our Asian-American identity."

Powers, his wife, and seven other families with Asian adopted children organized the event.

On Saturday children ages 4-8 made Chinese dragon boats out of colored paper and glitter. A team of junior councilors chaperoned the festivities. Powers said many of the junior councilors first attended the camp when they were young children.

"Kids that have been through our program now are becoming our own junior councilors."

The children presented the boats at a "parade" in the dining hall later that evening.

Kids ages 9-13 attended a workshop called "Defining Identity" hosted by social worker Kacy Ames. Ames was adopted from Korea when she was 4 years old and grew up in Brookline. She works as a child and family therapist at an outpatient mental health clinic in New York. She discussed the challenges Asian Americans face in forming their identity.

Powers said his favorite workshop was the adoptee panel hosted by Korean Americans Jamie Ramola, Sarah Smith, Anna Henry, and David Kim. The panel discussed identity issues and dealing with racism in American society.

Ramola said Asian Americans have two identities — their racial identity and their cultural identity, which they learn to balance over time. She said she embraces both identities.

Henry said racism is a problem Asian Americans deal with on a daily basis.

She said Asian Americans face racism personally and in the media but said face-to-face racism is the most offensive because "someone is passing a judgment on me purely based on how I look."

Sandwich resident Paul Driscoll said the panel was an opportunity for parents to "talk about some of the hard issues like prejudice," and prepared parents to address some of those issues with their children.

Kim said he hoped the panel would inspire parents to continue discussing those issues.

"One hopes that even a few of the comments shared here today will excite some thought."

Powers said discussing identity issues is particularly important for Asian-American children because it helps them to "get grounded."

"The adopted [children] are not Asian and they're not American. They're Asian-American. [The camp] is an opportunity for the children to be in an environment where they are around other [children] that look like them instead of being in the minority."

Although parents and children attended separate events throughout the day, they gathered together on Friday and Saturday night for two special shows. On Friday Behind the Mask Theatre performed "Cat Mountain," a play featuring traditional storytelling, original masks, music, dance, puppetry, and other art forms.

"The Odaiko New England Japanese Taiko Drumming Group" (O.N.E.) performed on Sunday. O.N.E. combines drumming and dancing to create a unique visual performance.

Powers said the weekend was an overwhelming success

"I think we improve upon the programming every year. This was one of the best years. It was tremendous."



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The Korean adoptee panel shared their experiences with parents. (Left to right: David Kim, Anna Henry, Sarah Smith, Jamie Ramola).



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Asian American kids ages 4-8 made dragon boats out of paper and glitter at the seventh annual Asian Culture Camp last weekend. (Left to right: Mayali Geyling, Emmali Frorer-Pinis, Jenna Koller).